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To Mr. & Mrs. Freeman Smith
with kind regards
from the author

Dan Rider

Xmas 1937.



**TEN YEARS' ADVENTURES AMONG
LANDLORDS AND TENANTS**

TEN
YEARS' ADVENTURES AMONG
LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

THE STORY OF THE RENT ACTS

BY
DAN RIDER

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS



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TO
MY DEAR WIFE

PREFACE

AT the request of hundreds of landlords, tenants and friends, has this book been written.

To many friends it has been possible to express my thanks in the course of my story. There are numbers of others, however, whose support and encouragement have helped me over many a rough stretch of road, and to these I now acknowledge my gratitude.

My warmest thanks are due to Mr. F. J. Harvey Darton for his help during the preparation of this book for the press; and to Mr. A. MacCallum Scott and Mr. Charles Kingston for their valuable criticisms and suggestions. To Mr. Henry Danielson I am further indebted for the Index.

I have endeavoured to present a living picture of my own experiences. With rooms filled with letters from those who are experiencing what His Majesty to-day describes as "the disastrous effects of the present shortage of houses upon our social well-being," I possess ample material to make the case stronger against the anti-social elements that see a selfish advantage in our troubles.

I have tried to tread the middle path, where I have found for company the best landlords and the

best tenants; and after ten years continuous conflict with legal quibblers, house-jobbers, and house-farmers on the side walks, I am more certain than ever that Arbitration and Conciliation are the only means of establishing equity and peace.

In the words of Walt Whitman I would say :

“Forth from the war emerging, a book I have
made,

The words of my book nothing, the drift of it
everything.”

DAN RIDER,

Hon. Secretary,
THE WAR RENTS LEAGUE

1, Roman Road,
Bedford Park, W. 4

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CHAPTER I

THE FIRST MOVE

THE first indication I received that difficulty might possibly arise during the war between landlords and tenants was early in September 1914. The announcement of the moratorium had allayed immediate fears, yet anxiety was general, as all the security upon which our individual worlds were built was undermined, and the calculations upon which business promises had been made were set at nought, by the sudden change from peace to war.

My personal business, that of supplying books to public libraries, was immediately destroyed. Local Authorities were ordered by the Government to exercise the strictest economy, and at once, without any hesitation, they reduced the Library rate by half and forbade new purchases. Other businesses, for which peace conditions were essential, suffered in a similar way, and the stunning blow given to those engaged in them, by the declaration of war, had not sufficiently worn off to permit of readjustment to war conditions by September quarter-day.

Getting home one evening early in September, I found my wife greatly distressed. During the day the house agent had made a call upon his tenants to inform them that he required his rent promptly upon quarter-day, and to warn them of the consequences if it were not paid to time. He told my wife that he had just come from the house of a neighbour, who was doubtful whether she would have the money

by that date, as her husband, being a Territorial, had been called up and had gone to France immediately war was declared, and she had not received a penny since his departure. What was more, she was expecting to become a mother again in a few weeks. Thinking to impress and frighten others, he boasted that he was not going to put up with excuses of this kind, and unless he had his rent when he called for it, he would seize all the furniture and turn the woman into the street, whether she were confined or not. If people thought the war made any difference to the landlords' rights they were mistaken. The landlord came first, and he would see that he always did. The war was nothing to him, and he was determined not to be the loser by it.

My wife told him what she thought of him, in more dignified language than he deserved, and as a protest against his brutal threats towards the soldier's wife, she said she hoped he would have to wait for his rents, and if he dared to molest the woman round the corner, he would have to deal with me. He did have to deal with me upon more than one occasion, but as he died suddenly after his last defeat, heartbroken at not being able to do as he liked, we will leave him in peace and not refer to him again, beyond giving him the credit of being the originator of the movement that brought forth the Rent Restriction Acts to control him and his kind.

The outstanding trouble at this moment and for the year following was the impossibility of tenants paying the rent they had contracted to pay, owing to loss of business, cessation of work, or the enlistment of husband or sons.

My notice was more specially drawn to this in the

case of artists, with whom I had a wide acquaintance. Commissions and engagements were suddenly cancelled or suspended, and there was no market whatever for pictures or literary work.

The end of the September quarter coincided with the end of the rating half year, and my artistic friends began to tell me that summonses were being issued and distraints being levied in their districts for unpaid rates, and that some of them were being threatened with imprisonment.

I consulted several Members of Parliament, and gleaned from them that a short Bill had been hurried through both Houses by agreement, without discussion or publicity, and had become law on September 18th, under the title of the "Rates (Proceeding for Recover) Act." This enabled local authorities to defer taking action for the recovery of rates. Under the old law proceedings had to be taken and a judgment obtained within six months after the rate had become payable in the case of the general district rate, water rate, highway rate and a few minor rates; but this did not apply to the poor rate and the rates connected with it, such as the borough and the county rates. If proceedings were not taken within the six months, the rates could not be recovered at any future time, which accounts for what has always seemed to be the unseemly haste on the part of rating authorities in issuing summonses long before the end of the rating period. This was a useful measure to enable local authorities to hold their hand in future, but it did not meet the immediate problem, as many authorities had already served summonses before the passing of this Act, and these were being heard daily.

I was given a copy of the Courts Emergency

Powers Act, which had just been printed, and which forbade the levying of distress and the taking possession of any property except after application to the Court, which had absolute discretion to stay execution for such time and subject to such conditions as it thought fit, if the person was unable immediately to make payment by reason of circumstances attributable directly or indirectly to the present war.

To my inexperienced mind this Act seemed to meet the difficulties at every point, and I returned to my friends with the good news that they had nothing to fear. I continued to hear, however, of the activities of the bailiffs, and one day I witnessed the seizure of a little home. I also found that the officials of the Water Board were going around cutting off the water supply, and then informing the Sanitary Authority, who promptly served notices upon the occupiers that unless the water was reconnected within so many days they would be fined £40.

Again I went to the House of Commons, only to be told that the authorities could not do such things, as they were forbidden by the emergency law. It was useless to tell them that, in spite of the law, such things were taking place—they could not credit my statements. So I determined to make some further investigations myself.

I had received two summonses for rates, one to be heard by a Magistrate and the other by Justices of the Peace. I resolved to appear in person and answer these summonses and verify what others had told me. Until now I had never been in a Police Court, and was as ignorant of the procedure as the majority of my fellow citizens.

On the appointed day, I arrived at the Police

Court to find myself one of a crowd of a hundred or more people, drawn from all ranks of life. The first case to be called was that of a young woman who was asked whether she owed the amount of the rate upon the summons. She admitted the debt, and then was asked why she had not paid it. She said her husband had been called up at the beginning of the war, and she had been left with their three children, but she had not received any money since, either from him or from the Government. She had a small millinery business, but as no one was buying hats and there was no trade about, she had been unable to find the amount necessary to meet the rates. For many years she had paid her rates regularly, but now she did not know what to do, nor which way to turn to get money.

The magistrate snapped out, "How long do you want?"

The woman, nervous and bewildered, replied, "I do not know."

"How do you think I am to know, if you do not tell me?" growled the magistrate. "Will a fortnight do?"

The woman, by now all of a tremble, did not know how to reply, whereupon the magistrate, bending over to his clerk, said in a low voice, "Distrain by consent in a fortnight."

This then was the way that people's homes were being sold up when their husbands were away fighting the country's battles. I sat on, and watched quietly and heard twenty cases or so before my turn came, and in every case the same order for distraint by consent in a fortnight was made.

At last I took my place in front of the dock. I

answered the preliminaries and then came the poser, "How long do you want?"

"I most respectfully ask your Worship to grant me the longest possible time within your discretion," I replied, and then quietly and courteously, I outlined my difficulties which had been directly caused by the war.

"Yes," said the magistrate pleasantly, "but you must state some definite time."

"How can I, your Worship? Everything is so indefinite just now," I replied.

"But we must have something definite," said he, becoming annoyed. "Shall we say a fortnight?"

"What is a fortnight in these unheard-of times?" said I. "I am afraid a fortnight is of no use to me. But as your Worship insists upon something definite, I would respectfully suggest that this matter be adjourned until the end of the war."

"What!" shouted the magistrate, taken by surprise.

"Everybody says the war will be over in three months," I hastened to add most sweetly, at which the magistrate and the whole court laughed, thankful to get relief from the tension of the last hour.

"Very well," he said with a smile still lingering on his face, and turning to the clerk he whispered, "Distrain by consent in three months."

"Pardon me, your Worship," I hurriedly ejaculated, as like a flash I saw the significance of that last smile, "I did not consent to a distraint. I simply asked for an adjournment."

"All right," he replied sharply, "the case will be adjourned for three months."

I retired to my seat in the court, and was interested

to notice that after my lead every other ratepayer who was called asked for three months, and got it.

This experience opened my eyes. The law was evidently strong enough to protect ratepayers who were distressed by the war. The trouble seemed to be in the way that it was administered. And yet, as I meditated upon it, I had to admit that I could not personally complain. I could not have wished for better treatment or a more patient hearing. I had got all I had asked for, but I had had to fight for it, which made it the better worth having. The real flaw was the ignorance of the people themselves. They did not know that a law had been passed to assist them in their difficulties, and even if they had known of it, they would not have been able to place their case coherently before the Court. I could not, however, see my way to forgive the administrators of an Act of Parliament, who smilingly evaded their responsibilities by leading distracted ratepayers to their own undoing, well knowing, all the while, that this Act was passed to meet exceptionally distressing cases in the greatest emergency this country had ever experienced, and that the great number of people brought before the Court would be the poorest and the simplest, for whose protection it was expressly devised. In my profound ignorance of these things, I had thought that the Court would inquire fully into the circumstances of the case and would apply the law justly to meet them. I little knew then that the Court would only deal with the evidence brought before it, and would not go out of its way to see that no injustice was done.

My interview with the Justices of the Peace was not so pleasant as that with the stipendiary. I duly

appeared at the local Police Court amid a crowd of anxious men and women who, like me, had never seen the inside of it before. Two local dignitaries were seated on the Bench, and the rate clerk called our names from his big registers. We were lined up in order of rotation, and we gradually wended our way to the centre of the Court, each of us arriving exactly in front of the Justices as his name was called. The Justices were busily occupied in ticking our names off a list like so many sheep entering a slaughter house, at the rate of one a minute, hardly giving us a glance. I remember the old lady who preceded me. She was a widow and earned her living by letting to young men boarders. Unfortunately for her these happened to be patriots and had joined up at the first sign of trouble, and as nobody at that time wanted rooms, she had not received any money for weeks. The Justices told her they could not help her, and unless she paid within twenty-one days her goods would be seized and sold. She left the Court crying and wringing her hands.

When I attempted to state my trouble they stopped me at the outset by telling me that business was going on everywhere the same as usual, it was all nonsense to say it was not, and that the longest time allowed by the law for payment was three weeks. The performance was farcical. I had heard and read about petty Justices, but I had never imagined them anything like this.

Before leaving the Court I inquired what the grant of three weeks meant, and I was told by an official that at the end of that time the parish constable would come and distrain upon my furniture without further warning. I suggested that a further applica-

tion would have to be made under the Emergency Act before a warrant could be granted, but he would not hear of it. Nothing like that was ever done at that Court, I was assured.

The lobby was full of murmurers. The police came and hustled us all into the road. There, a few of us compared notes, but none of us could devise any plan of making the Justices give us a hearing, to which, at least, we all thought we were entitled. We all abandoned any hope of getting justice or consideration there.

Upon reflection, I decided to write to the Chairman of the local Council, Mr. Cecil E. Bovill, who was a barrister, telling him of the want of consideration shown by the Court, and calling his attention to the Acts of Parliament passed to meet these emergencies. By return I received a letter stating that he intended to deal with all such cases himself, and if I could write him in the fullest confidence, stating my difficulties, he would not permit any action to be taken without his sanction.

Throughout the war, this gentleman tempered the wind to the shorn lambs of ratepayers in this way, and he not only gained their blessing, but the thanks of the community as well, as less rates were lost to the district than if immediate payment had been insisted upon.

CHAPTER II

ARTISTS AND SPORTSMEN

By the middle of October the war had entered upon a new phase. The German onslaught had been stayed for the time being by the Allied victory of the Marne, but Belgium was being overrun by the enemy. The retreat from Antwerp, and the arrival of the last boat from Ostend was destined to enlarge my sphere of activities.

Some time before the war, an artist friend, an American sculptor of some distinction, had brought a collection of his work from the South of France to this country with the view of exhibiting it in London. He took a large studio in the West End, and after months of preparation arranged for a show. Unfortunately for him, the war broke out whilst his exhibition was in progress, with the result that he did not obtain a commission, nor even sell a bronze. His resources were strained to the uttermost, so much so that one morning the manager of his hotel detained his clothes as security for payment. These were subsequently rescued, and he took up his quarters with me until things changed. Having a passionate love for France, he at once offered his home near the Pyrenees as a convalescent hospital for wounded troops, but being a man of restless energy, he could not remain idle, and immediately an opportunity presented itself to go to Belgium to make sketches for the press, he jumped at it, and started off, leaving his studio in my charge. It was not long before he

became attached to a voluntary hospital corps, and after many hairbreadth escapes, he arrived at Antwerp, taking part in the great retreat, and eventually landing in England again from the last boat that was to leave Ostend for some years.

Upon his return to London, our first business was to go to the studio. We could hardly push open the door on account of the mass of letters that had accumulated there since my last visit. Officialdom seemed to have been having a busy time; bills, accounts, demands, reminders, solicitor's letters and summonses littered the floor. We sorted them out in their respective piles, and decided that the rates demanded our first attention; in fact we were only just in time, as a summons was to be heard that very morning. Before many minutes we were standing before the Justice of the Peace, an elderly man, very crotchety, and very hard of hearing and disinclined to believe the little he did hear. He kept repeating that no one had suffered by the war, and there was no excuse for not paying; but after a quarter of an hour's hard argument from both of us, during which my impetuous friend nearly lost his temper, as he had to repeat himself so many times to be understood, we came away with an adjournment for six months.

We soon disposed of the other little matters, and at last we were faced with the landlord's demand for £60, the most formidable of all. Here we had to tread cautiously, as the Emergency Powers Act only applied to amounts up to £50. I advised that a polite letter be written stating the facts and asking him to extend his indulgence.

Some weeks later, I was shown a furious letter from the landlord threatening immediate proceed-

ings if the rent was not paid, which in the circumstances was quite natural, as no reply had been made to any of the letters he had written during the last four months.

Thereupon we determined to write to him at once. For two hours we applied ourselves to the task, destroying draft after draft, as nothing I wrote would please my friend, whereas all he wrote, I was sure, would displease the landlord. My friend could mould clay with the utmost facility, and he could talk like an angel, but he mistook the pen for a heavier weapon.

I can picture him now pacing up and down the room like a lion in a cage, freely giving his opinion upon most things in general and a few things in particular, and periodically bursting forth with,

"What am I to do with the stuff? I can't sell it. I can't pawn it. There's ten ton of it. Nobody wants it. I can't even send it back to France. What am I to do with it?"

"Is your landlord married?" I asked on a sudden impulse.

"Yes, why?" he replied, stopping and turning towards me, wondering what that had to do with his monumental troubles.

"Then, why not offer to do a bust of his wife?" I suggested.

"It's impossible," said he, resuming his restless stride. "She's . . . She's not a promising subject."

"Come," said I, eager to bring matters to an issue, and glimpsing some possibilities in what I had intended for a joke. "You must do something. You cannot pay him, and you will not write him, therefore you must see him. You may reckon he has

made up his mind by this time that he will never see this rent, and if he is a wise man he will accept anything reasonable in place of it. Go and see him, and offer to do a bust of his wife. Tell him you usually receive £350 for a bust. I have a feeling that he will accept it as a settlement of the rent and a compliment into the bargain."

With a grunt, my friend turned upon his heel, and I did not see him again until the next afternoon. Then he appeared dressed in his "glad rags," and looking his very best. He said he had thought over our conversation of the day before, and he had a good mind to call in and see his landlord that afternoon. With wishes of good luck he departed in order to be in time for tea.

The next day, just after noon, he came skipping into me, waving a slip of paper above his head, and beaming all over his face.

"I went there yesterday as I promised," said he excitedly. "They received me like a duke. The old lady was charming. She invited me to tea, and I told them all about my adventures in Belgium, and with the Red Cross. They were exceedingly interested, and gradually I led up to the matter of the bust. My boy, you should have seen them! They fell upon my neck. The old chap was so delighted he even gave me this cheque for £10 to put it into bronze. Come along to the Café Royal and have some lunch."

A fortnight later I had a call from a young painter. He was looking very down in the mouth, and he had been sent by my sculptor friend, who thought I might be able to help him as he was in trouble with his landlord. He owed £60 for rent, and I remarked what a strange thing it was everybody seemed to be

owing £60, whilst at the same time I mentally recalled the limit of the Emergency Act. The agents were threatening to distrain upon his home, and his wife was in a state of nervous collapse. He had not received a penny since the beginning of the war, and the outlook was hopeless.

"Has your landlord any daughters?" I inquired.

"Yes, two," he replied with surprise.

"How old are they?"

"About twenty-three or twenty-four."

"They will do," said I, amused at his amazement.

"I suppose your landlord has not any family portraits?"

"Portraits? I should think not. You ought to see the stuff he has upon his walls. It would make you faint. He's the most terrible Philistine I have ever struck."

"I thought so," I replied. "That is all the better. Now he is going to get a chance of something worth looking at. I want you to go to him and explain your circumstances quite frankly, and tell him you see no chance of meeting your obligations for some considerable time. Then offer to paint a portrait of one of his daughters to wipe off your debt. When he hears you usually get £250 for a portrait, believe me, I do not think he will turn your offer down."

When I met him again I discovered that he had painted portraits of both girls, and had not only overcome the threatened distraint, but had got a year's rent in hand.

Wonderful stories of my methods of patching up rent troubles began to be whispered around, with the result that I was inundated with artists from all over

London seeking assistance. Some of them I was able to help, but for the majority I could do very little. Few of them were so skilled as my first successes, nor did I discover any other landlords who were such good-natured sportsmen.

CHAPTER III

FIGHTING AND PAYING

ONE of the artists sent a young man from Tooting to me in the August of 1915. He said he was in trouble with his landlord, and that this particular trouble was occasioned by his landlord raising his rent.

"Raising your rent!" I exclaimed. "I wish someone would raise mine, for I can't. But seriously, do you mean to tell me that he wants to increase your rent?" I asked, to make quite sure that my ears had not deceived me.

"Yes, it is quite true, he is raising it from seven and sixpence to ten shillings a week," he meekly replied.

"A half-crown a week increase. Thirty-three and a third per cent. advance. What possible reason can he have for doing this?" I inquired incredulously.

"Here is his letter," said he, producing a document. "You will see he says it is to meet the increase of income tax proposed by the Government in their new Budget."

"What has that to do with you? It isn't your income that is being taxed, is it?" I replied with rising indignation. "Tell him to pay his own income tax, and to think himself lucky that he has any income at all in these times. Hundreds of us have not only no income, but we have lost our business and our capital as well."

"I feel just as indignant about it as you do," said he with a troubled look. "But, you see, he has also

given me this notice to quit. He can turn me out, can't he, if I do not pay him whatever rent he asks. "

In a moment I perceived that the problem had changed and assumed an alarming aspect. Hitherto my anxiety had been for those unable to pay their accustomed rents. There had never before been any suggestion of increasing the amount nor of wishing to disturb the tenants as long as that rent was paid. Now I realised in a flash that the Courts Emergency Powers Act was powerless to prevent rents from being continuously increased to any extent, and to stop evictions and distraints if not paid.

Reassuringly, however, I turned to the young man, and, to confirm my own faith in the decency of my fellows, I told him I did not believe that anyone would turn tenants out during the war.

" But they could turn me out after this notice to quit, if they so wished, could they not? " he doggedly persisted. " What am I to do? My wife is terribly upset, as we have three children and I cannot afford to pay this extra rent. I am only a clerk, and I have kept my job only by consenting to a reduction of nearly half my former salary. It is as much as we can do to get food at the prices being charged."

The only way I could see to deal with this situation was to draw up a polite letter to the landlord pointing out the exceptional circumstances and asking him to reconsider his demand; all further action being dependent upon the landlord's reply.

As the young man was going out of the door, I had a sudden inspiration and I called him back. Up to now, all my cases had been individual ones, but I had a feeling as though this was one of a group, as the landlord's letter was printed.

"Has your landlord any other tenants?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "three hundred and fifty."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" I said.

"You don't expect to save yourself alone, do you? Your action must save them all. It is all or none. Give me back that letter, and let me frame a petition."

The letter was quickly transformed into the heading of a petition, some sheets of foolscap were ruled for names and addresses, and my young friend was told to get as many signatures of tenants as possible, and then to send the petition to the landlord and await results.

A week or so passed before he called again. The petition had been signed by three hundred tenants, the other fifty being too timid to join in. He was scornful about this fifty, whose failure to participate had caused the delay in the sending in of the petition, but I urged him to deal gently with them, who were his weaker brethren, and to remember that the timid were always the burden of the valiant, and to be thankful for the magnificent response of the others.

Although the petition had been presented more than a week ago, the landlord had not condescended to reply, whilst the rent collectors had become more truculent than ever, renewing their threats of distress and eviction if the increases were not paid, and threatening still further to double the rent if they did not remove, as plenty of French and Belgian refugees would pay any amount for such places.

Mrs. Brown was told that Mrs. Smith had shown herself a sensible woman by paying what she was asked, and fearful of being left alone in the fight, Mrs. Brown at once succumbed, subsequently to find

that she had been tricked, for Mrs. Smith had had more sense than she had been credited with, as she had refused to pay.

Slimness, now and again, defeats its own ends, as it did in this instance, for this treatment so incensed every man and woman upon the estate, that it wrought a miracle by casting out the fear of the waverers and bringing them all in.

I also found that the experience of those tenants who had looked for rooms elsewhere confirmed my information that there were very few vacant houses. The houses that stood empty at the beginning of the war were being rapidly occupied by the thousands of our allies to whom these shores had afforded refuge. Many of these refugees had caused trouble to my artist friends by offering to pay anything for studio flats, and now it appeared that their less wealthy brethren were eager to obtain the houses and rooms occupied by our own workers.

I suggested that the next move should take the form of a public meeting in order to give force and expression to the grievance. I was told that there was a large Church Hall near the estate and that the Rector was a man with a keen sense of justice. Therefore I advised the tenants to send a small deputation to him to acquaint him with their trouble and to ask him to lend his hall for a meeting and to act as chairman. They were then to invite their landlord to attend the meeting for the purpose of explaining to them why it was necessary to increase their rents. And, I added, by way of encouragement, that if they could not put forward a better case than the landlord, they deserved to pay what he asked. I was invited to attend and also to speak, and I

promised to be there and assist them all I could, leaving all arrangements to them.

As the question of recruiting was prominent in the public mind, I wanted to know whether any of the tenants had volunteered to serve in the Army and the Navy, and I drew up a form with several columns for the entry of the number of the house, the name of the street, the name of the tenant, if husband or sons were serving, their regiment, rank, number and date of enlistment, the number of children and dependents, and the amount of separation allowance received by the family. I asked that every house upon the estate should be visited and this information supplied to me without delay.

After a few days the schedule was brought back filled up faithfully, and to my astonishment it revealed the startling fact that sixty-five per cent. of the tenants upon this estate had voluntarily entered the Country's service and were at that moment either fighting abroad or were in training to take their places there.

At this period, a soldier's wife received as separation allowance 12/6 a week, and 2/6 for each child up to three in number, and 22/- for herself and four children, which was the maximum number of children recognised, with an additional 3/6 a week to those who lived in the London area.

The higher cost of living had neutralised the small advance in the allowance that had been forced out of the Government, and an attempt was being made still further to increase their inadequate payments, more particularly as recruiting was falling off in consequence. Dependent mothers and sisters, whose son or brother had been the mainstay of the home,

were having a very thin time of it. Discontent was growing rapidly, and it was being remarked openly that the poor were not only expected to do the fighting, but to pay for it as well. This schedule, showing that over 200 had enlisted out of 350 tenants on this estate alone, and their being called upon to pay their landlord's contribution towards the war was proof that something was lacking in our war organisation which called for an immediate remedy.

Without a moment's delay I rushed off with this list to the House of Commons. Half way down Whitehall I saw Mr. John Burns striding along, and he being the most approachable of men, I caught up with him, and showed him my information, and hurriedly explained the situation to him. He studied it carefully for a few minutes.

"Have any municipalities increased the rents of their houses?" he suddenly inquired. "If you hear of any doing so let me know at once, and I will stop them, as I am sure there is no justification for it. I will go straight across to the Local Government Board and see what can be done about this case. You know what you should do, don't you? Go straight down to the House and rub their noses in it. They need it. Keep me informed. I'll help."

That morning and evening, and every morning and evening that week and the next were spent in the lobby of the House of Commons interviewing Members. I received a courteous reception as I had some definite facts to lay before them, and before many days I was able to supplement them with instances from places as far distant as Coventry, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Birmingham, Glasgow and Barrow, and to show that, wherever the Government had

concentrated work for the war or had started training camps for the troops, advantage was being taken by the private profiteer to the detriment of the local inhabitants.

My old friend, Mr. Harold J. Glanville, then M.P. for Bermondsey, was one of the first to give me the benefit of his expert knowledge of working-class property. To him tenants owe a deep debt of gratitude for the quiet and unobtrusive work he did for them during these years of the war. Personally I cannot thank him enough for his invaluable advice upon technical points that were always arising, the due appreciation of which was essential to the success of our efforts.

The late Mr. James Rowlands, then M.P. for Dartford, who was one of the hardest working Members of Parliament, rendered great assistance by keeping the subject before the House and the Government by means of questions and private consultations with Ministers.

Sir A. W. Yeo, then M.P. for Poplar, added some fire to the tenants' protests, both by speeches in the House and at public meetings. To him we owe the adjournment of the House that caused the Government to make official inquiries into the extent of the grievance. Mr. H. Chancellor, Mr. Percy Harris, and Mr. Will Thorne were also persistent in their demands for Government action.

I also received valuable help from Mr. Charles Duncan, M.P. for Barrow, who was the first Member to raise the question of rents in the House of Commons about a year previously, and Mr. G. N. Barnes, who afterwards made the subject his special study, and made valuable speeches in the debates that

occupied the House within a few months. But the majority of Labour Members at this time were too enthusiastic about enrolling recruits and preserving Trade Union conditions to give much thought to this growing grievance.

CHAPTER IV

WAR RENTS LEAGUE

THE War Rents League was started that very afternoon upon my return from my first mission of "rubbing-it-in."

I lunched that day, as usual, at a small and unpretentious French restaurant in a side street in Soho. Here, for some years before the war, had gathered for an hour or so in the middle of the day, a number of friends engaged in literary and artistic pursuits, for refreshment of mind and body. Special tables were reserved for our party, which was always being augmented by "*les amis de nos amis*" from America and the Continent. It was the one real live spot in London, Bohemian in the finest sense of the word, with plenty of good-natured badinage, where humbug received scant mercy, and prejudices were expunged by wholesome laughter.

Naturally I was animated by my adventure of the morning, and at the first opportunity I grew eloquent upon the tenants' grievances, especially the treatment of the wives and families of those who were doing their bit for us all, and I found myself continually repeating, as though by way of a refrain, that something had to be done to stop it.

One of the crowd, not being interested, snapped out, "Why don't you do it, then?" whereupon I retaliated sharply, "I will, if nobody else is willing."

Thereupon Robert Steele, the father of our happy family, in one of his thoughtful moods, proposed that

we form ourselves at once into a Committee; he would be chairman, and I should be secretary.

"How much is there in it?" sung out somebody at the end of the table, to which there was an unanimous shout, "Nothing," to be followed immediately by the expected reply, "Leave me out of it then." Which we promptly proceeded to do.

"We must have a name," said Mr. Steele. "I will give ourselves one. I have the very thing. Let it be 'The War Rents League.'"

This was received with acclamation and we all drank to the League's success.

Amid the noisy preparation of war plans in which the question of finance seems to have been overlooked, Robert Steele carefully composed two letters stating our aims and objects, which were typed and posted that night to *The Times* and *The Daily Mail*, but as these letters never appeared, I imagine they were promptly consigned by the respective editors to their waste paper baskets as not being of sufficient public interest.

In this way the War Rents League came into being, not expecting to be more than a nine days' wonder—anyone who gave it nine months would have been thought demented—but now, after nine years' work, as joyous and adventurous as any fight for the right must necessarily be, in which the endeavour is to convert enemies into friends, it has earned the respect of all men of goodwill, and in the present perilous and uneasy descent to decontrol, its conciliatory policy is seen to be more necessary than ever.

To many the War Rents League has always been a mystery. To me it has been something of a

miracle as well. Without funds, without assistants, with only temporary offices, always being moved on, and with only myself in evidence, our achievement has been truly marvellous. For the benefit of the uninitiated I will lift the veil to introduce them to their benefactors behind the scenes, and at the same time to pay my tribute to their unfailing support.

Our Chairman, Robert Steele, is primarily a man of letters. Learned in the lore of the middle ages, a recognised authority upon the works of Roger Bacon, and of Our Beloved St. Francis of Assisi, yet is he no worshipper of the dead letter but a diligent seeker after the living word, and the memory of William Morris has an added charm for us because he called him friend. Sincere, outspoken, a man of wide and generous views, he was the right person to save such a League from losing itself in a narrow groove.

Our Committee, with one exception, was composed of tenants, who, having varied interests in life, took broad views upon the course of events, and being free from the mass of intricate detail in which I was always immersed, they never failed to distinguish the wood from the trees.

Foremost among the Committee was Miss Netta Peacock, whose smile alone was sufficient to cast out all uncharitableness, and whose knowledge and experience as a writer upon Continental conditions was most useful and kept us abreast of similar movements abroad.

Mr. H. G. Webb, most versatile of artists, represented the League at several important conferences until military service took him to East Africa.

Mr. Sid Lovett, my old friend and comrade in

former housing campaigns under the intrepid leadership of Francis W. Soutter (whose "Recollections of a Labour Pioneer" has just had such a well-merited success), has always pulled his full weight in the boat, and his colleague, Mr. A. T. Stevens, the only landlord among us, has not failed to keep us well informed of the views of the one house owner.

Last, but not least, was the incomparable Jo Davidson—the Darling of the Gods—whose inspiring personality and wondrous energy enabled us at the beginning to get round many a difficult corner, until America recognised his genius and commissioned him to execute in France the memorial to their men who fell fighting for the safety of Europe and the world.

Long before Mr. Lloyd George devised his unique War Cabinet, we had started to work upon a much better plan. Instead of meeting at breakfast-time to discuss schemes when we were but half awake, we met every day at lunch, when we had been able to get to grip with affairs, and after satisfying the needs of the body, when the mind was in a free and generous mood, we reviewed the field of battle and laid snares into which our blind and greedy opponents never failed to walk.

No one has ever heard or dreamed of laughter at a Cabinet meeting. Laughter in a law court, except at the Judge's jokes, at an official or even at a policeman, is a terrible offence in this country, almost punishable with the extreme penalty, and during recent years attempts have been made to extend this to laughing at a landlord. But our Committee has never missed its daily laugh at the grasping landlords' expense, and I am told that I have grown fat upon it.

At all events, there is a legend that when I had an office in Fleet Street, opposite the Law Courts, I disturbed the bookworms in the Temple by hilarious commentaries upon High Court decisions under the Rent Act.

Our Committee has sat nearly every day for nine years, which I think constitutes a record. From time to time it has had notable additions. Mr. James Cully, J.P., of Southall, assisted us greatly, not only in his district with his personal advice to inquirers, but also by giving evidence on our behalf before Lord Hunter's Committee. Mr. Henry Danielson, bibliographer and bookseller, has rendered most material support. Mr. H. Gilham, most ardent of radicals, has helped us over many a stile, and Mr. James Sander, who at one period was Chairman of the Chiswick Housing Committee, and a Labour Councillor until the extremists preferred a Conservative to represent them, has also been a constant friend and adviser.

I must not forget to mention in this connection, one useful private weekly gathering which acted as a powerful stimulant and corrective. For some years before the war and until peace was declared, the Rev. A. W. Evans ("Penguin" of *The Observer*), and his charming wife held a Salon every Sunday evening after church at their home in Bedford Park. An invitation was a great honour for one was certain to meet there only those people who were keenly interested in doing things, and politics, philosophy, art and literature were freely and frankly discussed as among friends, and hard knocks were given and exchanged. Interesting people from all quarters of the globe would from time to time add the weight of

their personal experience to subjects under discussion, but the meetings were always maintained at a high level by our host, who was a deep mine of information and provocative suggestion in himself. The Rev. J. Cartmel-Robinson, our genial and jovial vicar, the Rev. T. P. Stevens, succentor of Southwark Cathedral, Mr. Henry Murray, author and critic, Mr. Roger Ingpen, publisher, Mr. Holford Knight, barrister, Mr. Charles Pears, artist, and the late Mr. W. L. George, were a few of the wits who added to our pleasant Sunday evenings. When the housing difficulty began to develop, it had to be laid upon the floor of the Salon, and throughout its different phases it was analysed and reconstructed many times. Upon every occasion new aspects of the problem were discovered, which were most useful in our attempts to arrive at a fair solution, and I cannot end this chapter without acknowledging our thanks to the Rev. and Mrs. A. W. Evans and all their merry company for the part they have played in this campaign.

These are the men and women, including my wife, the real mother of our cause, who have fought the Battle of Home Defence as never before. Anything I have been privileged to do is due entirely to their help and encouragement. Without them it would have been impossible. Providence provided me with sterling friends who have been more valuable than much gold, and it is to these that the millions of tenants who have benefited by their continual sympathy should return thanks.

CHAPTER V

CURE FOR LUMBAGO

A FORTNIGHT'S continuous lobbying in the House of Commons is enough to weary any human being. I was completely worn out with it. On the morning of Saturday, October 10th, 1915, I arose after a terrible night with the pains of lumbago severe upon me. My wife tried to induce me not to go to town, but something seemed to call me there. She made me promise I would return early and she would have ready a hot bath and mustard plasters, and her orders were that I should go to bed at once and remain there until the Monday. It was a pleasing prospect after what I had gone through, and secretly I was looking forward to this much needed rest.

But it was not to be. For the first letter I opened upon entering my office that morning contained a handbill and an urgent request not to fail to attend the meeting the Tooting tenants had arranged for that same evening.

I was in a dilemma. I could not sit, nor stand, nor move, nor sleep, without excruciating pains, and yet I was expected to address a public meeting for which I was chiefly responsible. Whatever happened I could not let these tenants down; they were relying mainly upon me. And yet, I could not get over the fact that I was certainly not in a fit state to go.

Suddenly I had a happy thought, and remembered my friend Hannen Swaffer, at that time editor of the *Weekly Dispatch*. I called to mind that his motto

was, "J'ai soif, je suis Swaff," which being interpreted meaneth that he was always thirsty for news. So I rang him up and asked if he would send a reporter to the meeting, as it was one of some importance, and I was unable to attend. When he heard the details of the agitation, he became so enthusiastic that I could hardly understand his replies, but I gathered that he was keen upon it as a story of real live human interest, and that if I would come round to the office at four in the afternoon he would tip a reporter on to me.

I expected to be home at one, and how to live out the time until four I did not know. But this was soon solved for me by the arrival of Jo Davidson, who, finding me looking so seedy, suggested that I should close up my business at once. In a few minutes he returned with a cab, and we went to Simpson's in the Strand, where we had lunch together. And it was some lunch, too! I felt decidedly better for it. We did not leave there until nearly four, when we went straight to Swaffer's office.

There the reporter was tipped on to me, and I told him everything I knew about the subject. He took down, in fact, the speech I had intended to make at the meeting. As I was leaving, Swaffer urged me to go with the reporter to Tooting, remarking that he was going to insert the interview as my speech, and it would look decidedly "rotten" for him if I did not show up there. I assured him that I was ill, and must get back home, and told him he could use the information I had given in any way he pleased.

I reached home about six feeling very shaky. I asked my wife if she would like to go to Tooting that

evening, to which she said I must be mad, as the bath had been waiting for me all day. I had a cup of tea and meditated for about an hour. Then I felt I must make an effort to go. Something kept telling me that this meeting was of the most vital importance and that I must see it through.

So at seven o'clock I started off alone. The night was damp and misty, and sent a cold shiver down my spine. I hesitated and thought of the warm bath, and almost turned back at the front door.

When I reached the station, I asked the booking clerk the way to Tooting, for although I had lived in London all my life, Tooting was a foreign land to me.

"Why Tooting?" he asked, which made me think it must be an awkward journey.

"I don't know," I replied, fed up with pains all all over me. "My wife says I am mad, but Tooting is the only place I want to-night. If I book to Wimbledon, can I get a 'bus to take me on?" I added, making a chance shot at it.

"It's much easier than that," said he. "Go to Hammersmith and take a tram."

That seemed simple, so I did as I was told. When I got out at Hammersmith, I was feeling very sick, so bad, in fact, that I gave up all hope, and hobbled into the Post Office and sent a telegram from the War Rents League to the meeting, wishing it every success in its fight in defence of the trenches of Tooting. This, I thought, would show that I had not forgotten them, and would serve as an apology for my absence. At all events, it was the only thing I could do at the moment.

But as I stepped out of the Post Office, Providence

seems to have planted an empty tram right in front of my path, with the one word, "Tooting" shining out of the mist upon me in letters of light. As though led by an unseen hand I entered it, slowly ascended the stairs, and took a seat in the family circle at the back of the car.

The night was very dark, and the few lights in the streets and upon the car were dimmed by order, for fear of air raids. Presently the top of the tram began to fill up, and as I was travelling into a strange country I started to make inquiries of my fellow passengers.

I asked the first man if he was going as far as Mitcham Lane, and when he said he was getting down soon, I knew I could not rely upon him. As others came up on top I repeated my question, until one man volunteered the information that I ought to get down at "The Mitre." So the next time I inquired, I said, "Is anybody going as far as 'The Mitre?'" This brought forth the reply, "What, do you want to stand me a drink, matey?" which produced a general laugh, and created a feeling of good fellowship among us all seated there in the darkness, and with the ice once broken we all started talking to one another.

During a pause, I suddenly remarked, "I hear they are raising rents at Tooting," at which the whole of the passengers turned round towards me and began speaking all together. I had evidently touched a sore spot. I learned that rent raising was the rule rather than the exception, not only among the residents of Tooting, but of Fulham, Wandsworth and Earlsfield as well, and before I reached "The Mitre," I was provided with the family history and

detailed records of the crimes of every landlord for miles around. One wag even suggested that the London County Council should be asked to change the name from Tooting to Looting, as being more appropriate.

Mitcham Lane was terribly black. It appeared to be a much frequented thoroughfare, as it was full of people, who kept bumping up against me as I tried to find my way to the Parish Hall. When I reached it I understood the reason for the crowds, for they were all coming to the meeting, and outside the Hall there were quite five hundred people trying to get in. I pushed my way through to find the Hall was filled to the doors, not even standing room available, and making myself known I was conducted to the platform to find the local committee seated round a table with the curtain drawn, looking worried and down-hearted. To my surprise I was told they could not hold a meeting.

"Why?" I asked. "Have you seen the Hall? You couldn't wish for a better meeting than that, and you have a larger one outside, as the people are filling the Lane. What's the trouble?"

"The landlord has given way," they explained.

"Isn't that what you wanted?" I retorted. "I came here to celebrate a victory, so let us get on with it at once."

The curtain was drawn aside, and the Chairman, the Rev. Derek Keppel, the Rector of the Parish, opened the meeting with a few well-chosen words. He called upon the tenants who had done the work to read the correspondence and to state the facts, after which he rose and read the landlord's letter withdrawing his demand, which seemed to have been

reduced from the sum first asked to sixpence a week, which the tenants also refused to pay. And then, he asked me to move a resolution calling upon the Government to make an order that no one should be turned out of his house during the war for refusing to pay increased rent.

This was to be a night of surprises, for I could not believe my ears when the letter was read. As I rose to speak I held out my hand for the letter in order to verify what I had just heard, for the final passage said that the notices to quit were not to be withdrawn against the two men who had been most prominent in the fight.

At once, I moved that no tenant upon the estate should pay any more rent until the offending reservation was withdrawn, which was carried unanimously and with much feeling by the crowded meeting, and before I had finished what the reporters described as a vigorous speech, word was passed to the Chairman that no tenant should be punished for any part taken in the protest. The Chairman announced that I would be willing to help anyone whose rent had been increased, and advised them to furnish me with the facts there and then. Until half-past eleven that night I was collecting details from mothers and wives of soldiers, who had come to the meeting from far and near, and the reporters of the Sunday papers waited for me to finish in order that they could obtain an interview.

I returned with five of them to Westminster, and they wrote their account of the meeting on the top of the tram.

I reached home at half past one on Sunday morning. My wife was in bed, but as soon as I entered

her room she wanted to know what kind of meeting we had had, and all about it. I gave her a glowing account. And then, suddenly, she inquired——

“How is the lumbago?”

I had to pull myself together and think carefully for a minute or two before I could reply.

“It’s gone,” I shouted with glee, punching myself all over. “I have forgotten all about it. I think I must have lost it at Hammersmith when I got on the tram.”

The fact remains, however, that a miracle had taken place. By trying to ease others’ burdens I had lost my own. And it is interesting to relate that I have never had it since, though, under advice, I touched wood when I wrote these words, as I do not want to make its acquaintance again.

CHAPTER VI

ORGANISING THE SUBURBS

THE Sunday newspapers gave excellent reports of the Tooting meeting, and they printed my address, advising all tenants in distress to communicate with me.

On the following morning, when I arrived at St. Martin's Court, I found a post-office van awaiting me filled with sacks of letters from all parts of the country. Several thousands of tenants had written off post haste to catch the Sunday mail. Every post throughout the day added more sacks to the pile, and sack was piled upon sack for the next three weeks after which huge packets took their place. From that day nine years ago until now, I have never ceased to be deluged with letters from the persecuted.

I was overwhelmed. It was impossible to reply to them, though some begged an answer by return. It was impossible to read them all, as some wrote pages, giving the story of their life. It was even impossible to open the day's delivery.

It was lucky that I was doing no business, as I could not distinguish my private letters from the others, and when I did find them, I began to realise the thorny path of a pioneer, as every person who imagined that I owed him twopence joined the opposition, and did his best to obstruct me by issuing county court summonses against me. But as Providence was in charge of this campaign, these evil intentions turned out a blessing in disguise. They forced me to fight my own battles in the county courts, and in this way to get at first hand a practical knowledge of the pro-

cedure, and to test both the strength and weakness of the Emergency laws. These experiences have enabled me to advise hundreds of poor souls who were being worried in a similar way. The determination to stop the movement by suppressing me became so great in some quarters, that if it had not been for the generous help of Mr. Henry Wills, a well-known paper merchant, and an old customer of mine, the War Rents League would have collapsed.

All day, for weeks, everyone who could spare an hour was pressed into the service of opening letters and sorting them out under their towns or districts, and placing them in piles around the room.

The Star rendered invaluable assistance. To simplify the task of collating the evidence it printed a list of questions for tenants to fill up, so that we could ascertain the essential facts at a glance, without wading through pages of interesting but unnecessary information, and day by day it kept this before the public. We thus obtained as complete a record of the grievance as it was possible to get, especially as it affected London and the surrounding districts, but letters came from every town in the Kingdom, and among them I received a pressing invitation to come at once to Belfast, where conditions were said to be terrible.

As soon as we could get a grasp of the situation, I tied together the letters from each district and took as many packets as I could carry to the House of Commons every afternoon. I called out the Member for the constituency and handed him the mass of letters from his supporters. He was taken by surprise; he could not believe it, but after looking them through he had to admit that there was a grievance,

and he invariably asked me what was to be done. All I could say was that was his job, but this sort of thing must be stopped.

After a time it became a joke in the lobby. Whenever I was seen arriving with my little lot, Members would come and ask me for whom the love letters were to-day, as most of them were written by the mothers and wives of soldiers. Eventually my daily delivery caused Members to crowd around me and this led to many useful discussions of suggested remedies. Many thought that the Courts Emergency Powers Act was strong enough to do all that was necessary. One day after I had proved to them that this was a weak little measure, they brought a learned King's Counsel to get his advice upon it. After I had put several cases to him, and shown him how the Act was being interpreted, he smilingly said to me, "You know what to do when an Act of Parliament does not fit your case, do you not? You should make your case fit the Act." And as he walked away, he advised me to think that over.

I did think it over very seriously. I have been thinking it over ever since, especially when I see lawyers evading the spirit of the Rent Act daily, by cunningly fitting their case to the letter of it.

One Member, a large owner of working-class property, after making inquiries of his agent, encouraged me by telling me he was astonished to find that he had made more from his houses during the war than ever before. The reasons were that every house was occupied and that only the most essential repairs were being done. And his experience had been confirmed by the owner of an adjoining estate. Thus, at the outset, I found myself allied with the

best type of property owner, who looked upon the unpatriotic speculator as an enemy of society.

For the next six weeks I worked incessantly night and day. Far into the night my typewriter (although an old one—a Smith Premier, No. 2—yet after typing a quarter of a million letters it is as fresh as ever), could be heard firing broadsides into landlords like a Gatling gun. Night after night long lists of typical cases were prepared and sent to the President of the Local Government Board.

The Ministry of Munitions was also bombarded with facts showing that whilst many of the 800,000 workpeople in their establishments were unable to find rooms near the works to which they were assigned (some having thrown up good appointments in Canada and elsewhere to come over to assist), others were being fleeced by avaricious landlords and tenants of houses who saw their chance of doing well out of the war. This unusual demand for housing accommodation was being turned to the disadvantage of other residents of the district, as old aged pensioners were being bullied out of their rooms, and soldiers' homes were being broken up so that rooms could be let to munitions workers at exorbitant rents.

Mr. Lloyd George had expressed himself in no indefinite terms a year before about landlords who would not act decently, and these facts caused him to announce that if he had not sufficient powers to deal with the new situation he would seek them. The War Rents League kept his department well supplied with information, and in return received the utmost encouragement and assistance from the Minister and his secretaries, Mr. William (now Sir William) Sutherland, and Mr. Syrett.

We also approached the Minister of War, Lord Derby, and pointed out that the falling off of recruiting was largely due to the way in which soldiers' families were being treated by reason of the lack of security for their homes whilst they were away. We went further, and were prepared to hold meetings in Trafalgar Square, asking all men before they joined up to get a direct guarantee from the Government that their wives and families, as was the rule in France, should not be disturbed by anyone during their absence.

Ministers were assailed by a continuous stream of questions from Mr. J. Rowlands, Sir A. W. Yeo, Mr. Barnes, Mr. Will Thorne and others, and their only reply was that they wanted facts, which we kept pumping into them. On October 18th, they made their first move by appointing a Committee composed of Lord Hunter and Dr. Scott of Glasgow to make an immediate inquiry into the increase of rentals of small dwelling-houses in Scotland.

So much was done and so many things were happening in so short a time that it is difficult to relate them in their order. Although the papers had printed my advice to the tenants who had written to me to maintain a firm resistance to the demands made upon them, and *Reynolds' Newspaper* had devoted much space to interviews with me, and articles by Mr. Charles Duncan and Sir A. W. Yeo, I received further letters from the same tenants, and many of them were so anxious that they called upon me. In this way I learnt that the most callous landlords were exercising all their powers to force submission, and trying to enforce their notices to quit by issuing summonses for possession.

At length, I decided to visit every district around London, and accordingly I wrote to several tenants in each asking them to get together a dozen fearless men and women and fix up a meeting in one of their houses, when I would attend and tell them how to organise for protection, and advise them how best to deal with their particular phase of the problem.

The first suburb to be visited was Edmonton, as it seemed to be dominated by some exceptionally lively agents, who meant to have their own way, and from my pile of letters it looked as though every resident there had written to me.

I had some difficulty in finding the place in the dark, so that I arrived at the street about half an hour later than the time arranged. It was a long street of little houses, and I was curious to find so many people standing about in groups. I thought there must have been a fight, or that a row of some kind had been going on. But when I reached the house at which I was expected, I was told that the neighbourhood had come out to welcome me, and that I had better get upon a chair and address them, otherwise they would be disappointed. So we planted a kitchen chair under a lamp-post that gave out a feeble blue-black light, and the meeting started. I wanted to find the exact facts of the trouble before I could deal with it, so I began by asking questions of the crowd. Before many minutes had passed, up rode two policemen and in gruff voices they told us to move on, and began hustling the audience. Spotting the house agent on the outskirts of the meeting, the tenants jumped to the conclusion that he had sent for the constables, and some of them suggested "going for" him. Still standing upon my platform,

I civilly asked one of the policemen the reason for this action. All I could get from him was that no meeting was allowed to be held. I pointed out that the crowd was getting out of hand, and there was likely to be trouble, as they were incensed against the agent, thinking that this was his work; if he would tell me the reason for this interference I would undertake to disperse the crowd, otherwise he must take the responsibility for what might occur. Thinking better of it, the constable told me they had just received warning of an air raid. At once I appealed to the crowd, disabused their minds about their agent, and as an air raid might take place at any moment, I advised them to adjourn to their wine-cellar and sing the National Anthem. Good-humouredly they at once dispersed, the agent's life was saved, and a lady lent me her kitchen for a meeting of a few reliable men and women.

There I learned the facts of the dispute, and also that there was a sympathetic vicar, the Rev. E. D. S. Camus, with a church hall, near by. Everything was set in motion for a public meeting during the coming week.

The air raid materialised as expected. On my way home I saw the zeppelin sailing high over London. But no letters were written that night, as I had to walk all the way home and did not arrive until dawn was breaking.

CHAPTER VII

MERRY MEETINGS

THE dropping of bombs by the zeppelins did not create nearly as much terror as the dropping in of notices to quit by landlords and their agents. An air raid was sudden and done with, and if a house were destroyed it was rebuilt and the family looked after until they could be re-instated, and if a family were wiped out there was an end of them. But the threat implied by a notice to quit, when no other place was obtainable, was a system of torture more or less prolonged, that struck terror into the minds of women and even affected strong men. The terrorism of the German bombers was often spoken of as more merciful than that of the English bullies.

My first efforts were directed to taking the sting out of the notices to quit. As by laughing at our fears we rise above them, I deliberately set out at the meetings I held to ridicule them out of consideration. It was great fun, and I enjoyed it as much as anybody. All the tenants in my audiences rocked with laughter, and for weeks could not help thinking of a notice to quit as a huge joke. And the landlords bit their lips and looked glum when they found their only gun had been spiked.

I would commence by inquiring if anyone had received a notice to quit, and asked all those who had to hold up their hands. Then I would congratulate them and ask them to feel that they were specially honoured. With those who had been neglected I would sympathise. Every self-respecting tenant was

being given one. It was a War Bond for the poor. They would all get one in time, so they were not to be frightened and tremble at the knees when the landlord served it upon them. It was a mark of distinction.

Some landlords gave a notice upon the bluest of blue paper; it looked official but it was not, as any piece of paper would have done. Then, I would ask all tenants who had brought their notices with them to hold them up for the audience to see. Those with blue ones should be specially proud of them, and every tenant should endeavour to be rewarded with a coloured one on account of its greater decorative value as a souvenir.

When the landlord handed in the notice to quit they were advised to receive it kindly, and simply say, "How perfectly splendid of you." In many cases I found that the tenants obeyed me to the letter. After five hundred tenants on one estate said this to the landlord, he went home and scratched his head, saying, "I really don't think they treat the matter seriously. I wonder who has been putting them up to this?" What was the poor fellow to do? By serving so many notices he had inflated the currency, and he might be sure that the Court would not honour them at their pre-war value. I foresaw that if the country were flooded with notices to quit the landlords would be driven to the Court, their last trench, and then we should get the Government to finish them off.

I advised every woman to take care of her notice to quit and to have it framed and hung over her mantel-piece, so that in the days to come when her grandchildren asked her——

"Grandma, what did you do in the Great War when Britain fought for Freedom?" she would take down the notice to quit from the mantelpiece and would say——

"My child, during the Great War when Britain fought for freedom, I had this document presented to me. Never before in the history of our family, and you know we came over with William the Conqueror (more or less), have we had such a high distinction conferred upon us. And this has been treasured by me to show you, dear, so that you can also show it to your children's children and tell them the story, that whilst your father was fighting for freedom abroad, your grandmother did her little bit at home, and the landlord presented her with the freedom of the street. Kings and statesmen have often been presented with the freedom of a particular city, but my presentation knew no limits, as it embraced all the streets in the land. What the Victoria Cross was to the soldier at the front, so was a notice to quit to the woman who resisted the demands of the rack-renter at home."

Some landlords served fresh notices to quit every week upon their tenants, so I started a competition for the tenant who held the greatest number. The children joined in the fun, and began asking the landlord for notices to quit instead of cigarette pictures. One elderly lady received an ovation when she ascended the platform and exhibited five true blue notices, which at that time was the record. This never failed to drive the demon of fear out of the tenant, and acted like a charm.

Our meetings were the most cheerful and original entertainments in and around London, and the thou-

sands that flocked to them in all quarters as far afield as Edmonton, Ilford, Croydon and Southall, thought they had discovered a second Dan Leno. They were a counterblast to the depression being caused by the slow progress of the war, and helped to support the fighting morale of the people.

Writing of this period in an article entitled, "A New Dickens Trailing his 'Scrooges,'" Mr. J. P. Collins, at one time Mr. J. L. Garvin's second in command upon the *Pall Mall Gazette*, calls this the Dickens light on things that the tenants of the back streets of London could not fail to see when put to them. The only way, that I could see, to recruit a fearless army was to encourage the tenants to look lightly and contemptuously upon the bullying methods that were being employed against them.

In the background there always lurked the fear of being summoned to that strange place, the Court, and being ordered to give up their homes. By chance I had some stories to dissipate that nightmare, and to turn the County Courts into places of entertainment more interesting than cinemas.

I would recount cases, that I myself had heard, with the fullest details, in order that tenants might get some idea of the procedure adopted.

One case in particular always amused them. A woman, who owned three houses next door to one another, gave notices to quit to each of her tenants, as she had received advantageous offers for them from refugees. She refused their rent and summoned them to the Shoreditch County Court. At that time His Honour Judge Smyly presided there, and the memory of this wise and merciful Judge is honoured by all who knew him, and he will not be

forgotten by tenants who appeared before him in the early days of the war.

I had advised the three tenants to put their rent aside and bring it to the Court with them. They were to ask certain questions of the landlady after she had given her evidence, showing that they were old tenants with families, having as many as twelve children among them, and that the only reason she wanted them out of the houses was to get a higher rent from someone else. They were also to be ready to show what efforts they had made to find another place. One of the tenants had had a bit of luck, as he thought, as a friend had found a house for him. I begged him not to remove until the case had been heard. He was a man of little faith, and when I arrived at the Court I found he had removed to the new house the day before.

Judge Smyly listened patiently to the cross-examination of the landlady, and he then vanquished her with some questions of his own. He said he was sorry to have to make an order for possession in twenty-one days, but the law gave him no option, although before the order could be put into force an application would have to be made under the Emergency Act, and he would extend the time until other accommodation could be found, but before that time arrived he had no doubt that Parliament would bring in a measure to stop tenants being distressed in this way.

The Judge then asked the first man how much he owed, and he replied that it was not a matter of owings; he had always paid his rent regularly as his rent book showed, but the rent had been refused. The Judge totted up the amount, and told the man

it came to three pounds ten shillings, which he would be required to pay at the rate of two shillings and sixpence a month. This meant that the greedy landlady was punished by being made to wait twenty-eight months for it. The same applied to the other tenant who was still in the house, but the one of little faith, who had removed, was ordered to pay up the whole amount within a week. He was very sore about it, as it had cost him more than that for removing expenses.

As we left the Court one of the tenants turned to thank me and asked if I would have a drink. I told him I didn't drink. Holding his rent in his hand and wondering what to do with it, he suddenly caught sight of his wife, and as he wanted to do a good turn to somebody, he exclaimed, "I'll tell you what I'll do, old gal. I'm blowed if I don't treat you to a new dress." The other tenant could do nothing but follow suit, so they went away in high glee feeling rewarded for their courage.

"Now, ladies," I would say, in pointing the moral, "If there is one thing above all others that I know you have been longing for ever since the beginning of the war, and cannot get, it is a new dress. Here is the only way to obtain your heart's desire. Make your landlord present you with one. If he will not take your proper rent put it aside, and challenge him to take you to the Court. You have nothing to lose. You have a new dress to gain. And if that is not enough to make a woman brave, I should like to know what is?"

This may have been theatrical, but it was not worse than the means employed to recruit Kitchener's Army, and there is no doubt that it was just as effec-

tive, as my Army of Home Defence, composed chiefly of the mothers and grandmothers of England, swept all before it and won a decisive victory before the end of the year.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LANDLORDS' GRIEVANCE

A POWERFUL, grimy-looking workman rushed into my office one morning, so upset that as he told me his story he burst into tears. He said he had been sent to me by the Magistrate at the Lambeth Police Court. Some weeks before a man had brought him a County Court summons, and he had refused to take it, kicking it into the road, where it had got lost. Getting nervous about it, as he knew it was issued by his landlord, he consulted his shopmates, and the foreman gave him time off to go to the Police Court and ask advice. The Magistrate said he should have accepted the summons and taken the matter lightly; he had better ask at the County Court what he was summoned for, and then see me. The County Court clerks informed him that the summons would be heard the next day at half-past two in the afternoon but they could give him no particulars.

All I could gather from his excited talk was that the agent had asked for a shilling a week more rent, which he had refused to pay, and that no rent had been accepted for about three weeks. He could not tell me whether he was summoned for rent or possession, or both. His landlord owned eleven houses in the terrace. All the tenants had refused payment of the increase, but he was the only one shot at. He was being made an example of. About half of the men in the houses had joined up, and he with the others were at work upon munitions, near by. He had a large family and was distracted, and he begged me to get a solicitor to fight for him.

I promised to do what I could, but I pointed out what a hopeless job it seemed, as he did not know why he was summoned, and he had no details to leave with me. I asked him to meet me at the Court next day at two o'clock, and to get his wife and the wives of the neighbours to accompany him. Above all he was not to fail to bring his rent book, and all the rent that had been refused, and any notices he had received from the agent.

That afternoon and the next morning I hurried around to find a solicitor who would take up the case. Many were away upon vacation, some refused as there was no money in it, whilst others were not going to Court to make fools of themselves as the man evidently did not stand a ghost of a chance. All my appeals were in vain.

I had promised to assist the man and I could not let him down, and the difficulties in my way interested me. I decided to write a letter to the Registrar of the Court informing him that the defendant was unable to obtain legal assistance, and asking permission to help him if necessary, as he was inarticulate and as this case was one of some importance affecting a number of other tenants in the district. With this in my pocket I met my man and the women as arranged, and I thoroughly drilled him in what he ought to say.

When the Court opened, I handed my letter to the usher, and asked him to give it to the Registrar, and Mr. Pritchard, with that courtesy for which he is so highly respected, sent me word that he would put the case back to the last, and would call upon me if my help were required.

Immediately the case was called, the tenant, as

nervous as a kitten, rushed into the defendant's box, and with one pop, like the cork coming out of a bottle, he burst forth with all I had told him, in a loud voice, shaking the rent he held in his hand.

The Registrar was overwhelmed with this violent flood of words, and when he could recover himself he told him to answer the questions put to him. It turned out that he was only being sued for rent at the increased amount he had refused to pay. He was asked what notice of increase he had received, and he pointed to the note in the rent book that the rent would be one shilling a week extra from a certain date. Turning to the agent, the Registrar asked whether that was the only notice he had given to the tenant, and he admitted that it was. The Registrar then took the agent to task telling him that he ought to have known that he could not increase a rent until the tenancy had been terminated, and as the tenant had not surrendered his tenancy and accepted a new one at the higher rent, he had no grounds for his plaint, and the case would be dismissed.

In order to settle the dispute for both parties, he went into the figures of rent due, and told my man if he paid ten shillings his rent would be clear to date. Upon hearing this, one of my lady friends among whom I was sitting, shouted out, "Don't you pay 'im nuffin', Charlie," whereupon the usher started to bustle us all out of Court. In the hubbub I could not gather the remarks being made by the Registrar, so I turned to my man and asked him what was said. Now that he had got through his trouble, he could only boast of the things he had said he would do to the agent. It was hopeless to expect him to understand what had taken place, so seeing the agent

coming from the other side of the Court, I inquired of him what had happened.

"I've lost," said he, in such a frank and open manner, with not the slightest sign of ill feeling, that I liked him at once. He was a fat, ruddy complexioned man, and looked a good sort.

"I didn't give him proper notice," he added, and fearing lest he might correct his error straight away, I remarked, "All your tenants are outside. They seem a decent lot. Why not make it up with them?"

"Yes. They're not a bad lot, are they?" he rejoined pleasantly.

At that moment we arrived at the lobby where the women had congregated talking excitedly, so striking the iron whilst it was hot, I caught hold of his arm, and said, "Ladies, I don't think your agent is such a bad sort. He is willing, I believe, to make it up with you all."

The agent then rose to the occasion like the man I thought he was, and said, "Now, look here, ladies, your landlord is a Scotsman, and lives in Edinburgh. He wrote and told me to put up your rents. I did so, but it hasn't come off. So, you can take it from me, if he wants to put them up again, he will have to come and do it himself. I have had enough of it. You can now go home happy, as I shan't worry you again during the war."

After some good-humoured chaff, everybody went away delighted, and I proceeded to return to town.

A little ahead of me I saw the agent, and I hastened to catch up with him.

"You treated that situation magnificently," said I, "but what was your reason for increasing their rents?"

"Who are you?" he inquired.

"I am only a friend of your tenant. I really came to keep him quiet, but as you see, he was too much for me. I am glad I came, however, because I have been charmed at the sportsmanlike way in which you have accepted your defeat. I suppose you have your difficulties like most of us, but I really am puzzled to understand why you should increase rents, just at this time."

"Well, the rates have gone up," he replied.

"Not in Camberwell, for they have gone down 4d. in the £," I corrected him.

"Look at the cost of repairs?" he added mournfully.

"But you have done nothing to those houses for twenty years," I replied as a chance shot.

"What, have you seen them then?" said he astonished, thinking I knew more than I did.

"Have you no better reason than those?" I continued.

"The zeppelin insurance is extra, you know," said he.

"Yes, but you don't insure your tenants or their furniture, do you?" I replied. "You only insure your house, and you need not do that unless you choose. I think you ought to pay that little bit."

"Well, what about the income tax, that is going up again?" said he more hopefully.

"That, I decidedly think, is a personal matter you ought to see to yourself. In reality, you admit you have no reason for raising rents that will hold water," I concluded.

"Speaking seriously," said he, "we have a very great grievance. The mortgagee is our trouble.

He is calling in his money or else exacting more interest, and every one per cent. means a shilling a week on these rents."

"Why is he doing that?" I inquired.

"Because he wants to put his money into munition and aeroplane works and get 20 per cent. Then the new War Loan being issued at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. has knocked everything out of gear. The financiers are causing all the trouble. They have squeezed the Government and now they are squeezing us."

"Are there many houses mortgaged?" I asked, deeply interested.

"You don't think we build these places with our own money, do you?" said he with contempt. "About 95 per cent. of working-class houses are mortgaged."

"How much do they lend you upon them?"

"Generally two-thirds," he replied.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" I inquired.

"What can be done? Nothing," said he despondently, "nothing on earth can stop it."

"I am surprised to find you so hopeless," said I sympathetically.

"I suppose you don't care, as in the end you will turn the increased interest upon the tenant. It is the poor that always pay, as the saying goes," I continued.

"Exactly," said he, feeling that I was now talking common sense. "We shan't pay it, you bet."

"Look here," I said. "I am determined that the tenant shall not be made to bear the whole of the financial burden of the war. I do not want to be unfair to anyone, and it would be unfair to you if

you had to bear an increased interest. You will have to put up a fight against these mortgagees, as the tenant is doing against you, otherwise you will deserve all you get. Your only way out is to join forces with the tenant against the man on your back."

The more I thought of this conversation on my way back to town, the more I saw that I had put my finger upon the real source of trouble. If I could relieve the landlords' only grievance, they would have no case, and I could then help the tenants. To save tenants it would be necessary to save landlords as well.

Coming out of Charing Cross Station, I ran into Mr. H. R. Aldridge, the secretary of the National Housing and Town Planning Council.

"Hallo! You young rascal! What poor landlord have you been doing down to-day?" said he jokingly.

"The landlord went down all right," I replied. "But what is of far more importance, I have discovered that the landlord has a real grievance. I have been looking for one for weeks, and I feel sure I have found it at last."

"No! No!" said he. "You are pulling my leg?"

"Not a bit." I burst forth full of my new discovery, and I excitedly told him all about it, and what it had suggested to me.

"I am very interested to hear of this adventure," said Mr. Aldridge. "You ought to have a talk with Mr. Edwin Evans, as he was telling me something very similar yesterday. If you will be in to-morrow I will bring him round."

"Who is Mr. Edwin Evans?" I inquired.

"Don't you know him? He is the President of

the Property Owners' Association, and the Chairman of the London County Council Housing Committee. You and he ought to get on well together."

The next morning at eleven as arranged Mr. Edwin Evans and Mr. Aldridge called upon me.

"Friend Aldridge tells me you believe we have a real grievance," said Mr. Evans, getting right away with the subject.

"If what I hear is true," I replied, "you seem to be in a mess."

"A mess, you call it! Why, it's a thousand times worse than that," said he, and taking a bundle of papers from his pocket he handed them to me and continued, "just look at those. They are all notices calling up money on mortgage that I have received on behalf of a few of my own clients. That lot comes to half a million. All over the country agents and owners are receiving similar demands. £300,000,000 is required to be found in three months. Why, the Government could not raise as much for a War Loan. Where can we find it, then? It is impossible. Unless something is done and done quickly, we shall all be ruined. This is the greatest crisis we have ever experienced. We shall all of us be sold up, and houses will be going for two a penny at forced sales."

"What are you going to do about it?" said I, "I am determined that tenants shall not suffer."

"Look here," said he, placing his hand upon my shoulder and talking earnestly. "I am entirely at one with you in all you have been trying to do. I have sons of my own fighting in France and Flanders, and I know what it means. My wife is ill with anxiety for their safety. I know what some of these tenants are going through, and I would not do any-

thing to add to their troubles. I have not raised a single rent to any of my tenants. I have made many agents and owners withdraw their demands already. I have done all in my power to restrain other property owners from increasing their tenants' rents. I have written to the press denouncing such actions as unpatriotic. If you will join with me in stopping the mortgagee, I give you my word I will use all the influence of my association to stop rents being increased during the war."

Upon this we shook hands, and Mr. Aldridge agreed to call a conference of landlords' and tenants' societies and to invite Members of Parliament who were interested, to help draw up suggestions to lay before the Government.

Mr. Edwin Evans has been as good as his word, and until the end of the war, he was as determined an opponent of increasing rents as anyone in the country. Never did I appeal to him in vain to bring an obstinate landlord or agent to task if connected with his association, and I have known him refuse membership to undesirables. We do not agree upon many things, but his sincerity and good faith are beyond question. He has had a difficult task to restrain some of the hot-heads of his party, but his bluff good humour has worked wonders.

Lord Desborough, the Chairman of the Land Union, also made an earnest appeal in *The Times* to the patriotism of house owners and mortgagees to abstain from raising rents and rates of interest during the war, and he strongly condemned the attempts to shift the burden of personal taxation upon the tenants.

CHAPTER IX

JOINT CONFERENCE

THE conference arranged by Mr. Edwin Evans and myself was held on November 8th, 1915, at Mr. Aldridge's office in Russell Square. It was presided over by Councillor Harold Shawcross, J.P., Chairman of the National Housing and Town Planning Council.

The landlords' representatives were Mr. Edwin Evans, for the Property Owners' Association, Mr. A. W. Shelton for the United Kingdom Federation of Property Owners, and an official from the Land Union.

The tenants were represented by the late Mr. H. M. Hyndman, Mr. Sidney Webb, and Mr. J. S. Middleton (Secretary of the Labour Party) on behalf of the Workers' National Committee, Mr. L. A. Hill and Mr. J. Silas Whybrew of the Workmen's National Housing Council, and Mr. Robert Steele, Mr. H. G. Webb and myself on behalf of the War Rents League.

The late Mr. James Rowlands, Mr. Glyn Jones, and Mr. Chancellor also attended to represent those Members of Parliament who had interested themselves in the subject.

Resolutions drafted by Mr. Sidney Webb were unanimously agreed to, embodying the following points : That tenants should be empowered to appeal to County Courts against increases, and the cost of procedure should be minimized; that neither rent nor interest on pre-war mortgages should be raised above

pre-war rates for the duration of the war; and that notices of determination of tenancy should be subject to the provisions of the Courts Emergency Powers Act.

A deputation from the conference laid these views, the same afternoon, before the late Mr. Walter Long (the late Lord Long of Wraxall), the President of the Local Government Board.

In reply Mr. Long said that the action of the deputation had been a public spirited one and was specially welcome to the Government, who were busy investigating the matter, and had that day been considering the results of the inquiry by the Scottish Committee which had been sitting to consider the subject. He referred in emphatic terms to what appeared to be regrettable action on the part of some mortgagees in requiring an increase in the rate of interest on mortgages, more especially as the effect of the war in regard to the value of their securities was less than the effect on other securities. He promised to give full consideration to the proposals although he could not give any pledges as to the action the Government might take.

He requested Mr. Edwin Evans to place before him all the facts respecting increase of mortgage interest, and he asked me to supply full details of all cases of increase of rent, and to mark specially those I had personally investigated.

For the next few weeks both Mr. Evans and I were hard at it. *The Star* again printed its advice to tenants who had not written to send me in confidence the full facts of their cases, and where the increases seemed to be outrageous I took the trouble to visit the tenants and verify their statements.

In this way I discovered beyond a doubt that the situation in the suburbs of London was worse than in any other part of the Kingdom. Enfield and Woolwich, owing to the influx of workers at the Government establishments, and the pressure upon them all to work overtime and also on Sundays, were full to overflowing, and the most extravagant rents were being demanded, not only from those who were working at munitions, but from everybody who lived there, irrespective of circumstances. At Southall, for instance, I found that a hundred per cent. increase was common, whilst the speculative builders, and more especially those who traded under the name of a company, who had houses around the outskirts of the Metropolis, thought their chance of getting easy money had arrived, and they were determined not to miss it.

The report of the Scottish Committee of Inquiry was presented to the House of Commons on the following day. It showed that Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee were subject to the same tendencies that prevailed in London, but not nearly to so great an extent, as the average increases were only about five per cent. and very few exceeded fifteen per cent. As with us, there had been two and three increases upon the same tenant since the beginning of the war, and this was likely to continue, whereas new tenants were being asked any amount, even for dilapidated dwellings, and this rent the owners were seeking to adopt as a standard to which all rents of similar sized houses should be increased.

The situation in Scotland, and especially in Glasgow, which owing to its proximity to the Clyde was the storm centre in that country, differed in many

ways from that of England, and looking back upon it after the experience of nine years, I think it a pity that separate legislation was not passed to deal with it.

In Scotland, as one witness said, they build for ever, whilst in England we build only for a certain time. The stone may be more substantial than our brick, but these stone dwellings are often whited sepulchres, as the inside is mostly jerry-built, and requires constant repair, the cause of endless strife between factors and tenants.

These huge blocks of buildings are often leased to a factor who bears all the risk of empties, bad debts and repairs, and whose sole anxiety is to make them pay. Personal dealings between landlord and tenant are not so frequent as in this country. Consequently, it is not surprising to find a strained relationship existing between them which has acted against the making of friendly agreements to tide over abnormal times.

The appalling condition of working class housing in Scotland, which was the subject of a Governmental inquiry when war broke out, also tended to estrange the tenants' leaders, who declared themselves opponents of private ownership of houses, and as the abolition of this system was their main object, they utilised the present discontent to that end.

In England, this has never been the attitude adopted by tenants, excepting by a few extremists. The War Rents League did not seek to exploit the abnormal conditions that prevailed for political ends. However much our Committee may have thought private enterprise not to be entitled to boast of any success in meeting the housing needs of the people, we never allowed this to divert us from our one

object, which was to protect the homes of the people, in a time of scarcity, against destruction by speculators and profiteers, whether they were landlords or tenants.

The Scottish policy was an attack upon private landlords, whilst ours was a defence of all tenants against unscrupulous ones. Our policy has led to agreement and conciliation, whilst theirs has engendered open conflict, much to the disadvantage of all tenants throughout the kingdom.

It is interesting to note that evidence for the tenants was given at this inquiry by Mr. John Wheatley (the late Minister of Health), Mr. James Stewart (the late Under Secretary of Health for Scotland), and Mr. Andrew M'Bride, whose work in connection with housing upon the Glasgow City Council commands respect.

The report of the Committee confirmed the deductions we had already drawn from the facts in our possession, that the margin of empty houses was rapidly vanishing, that the increased demand and limited supply, both caused by circumstances due to the war, were being used against the interests of the community, that where rates had increased the increase should be borne by the tenant, but that neither the increased cost of labour or materials for repairs, which were negligible, nor the increased income tax, were any justification for increases of rents. The increase of mortgage interest was also found to be due to the issue of War Loan Stock at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

About this time Sir Alfred Mond produced a draft Bill for the relief of soldiers and sailors. It was a poor attempt to deal with the matter, but as I thought it might be made the nucleus of a better

measure I wrote to him and was granted an interview in the lobby. I failed, however, to induce him to consent to extend its protection to civilians or even to enlarge the scope of it. As it only affected houses under £30 a year that were let upon tenancies for a period of a year and over, it did not touch the homes of the vast majority of our soldiers and sailors whose tenancies were mostly weekly ones and at a rent of more than eleven shillings and sixpence a week in London.

Sir Alfred Mond may be a financial genius, but he evidently failed to understand the workers' housing difficulties.

The following fortnight witnessed a variation in our plan of campaign. As the Minister required the exact facts we decided that he should have them at first hand from the afflicted tenants themselves. Deputations of men and women were appointed at all our meetings, and Mr. Walter Long listened with great patience to their stories and examined their statements.

The deputation I most distinctly remember was one from Rotherhithe and Dockhead, which was introduced by Mr. H. J. Glanville on November 22nd, 1915. This was the largest deputation the Minister received. Some weeks previously an ex-policeman living in a block of workmen's dwellings had sought assistance of me for himself and neighbours, who numbered several hundreds. He had been to the local Labour Party, who were most sympathetic, but were too busy to do anything for them. I wrote, therefore, to the Member for the Division, Captain H. W. Carr-Gomm, but as he was away upon active service he sent my letter to his colleague Mr. Glan-

ville, asking him to look after his constituents. No grass was ever known to grow under Mr. Glanville's feet, and the same day he fixed up a meeting at a neighbouring chapel, at which he took the chair supported by Mr. Felix Pridmore, J.P., and the deputation was appointed.

We expected to be received at five o'clock, but word was sent asking us to wait as the Minister was holding a special conference. At seven o'clock we were all conducted to his private room, where he explained that he had been engaged with Mr. McKinnon Wood, the Secretary of State for Scotland, endeavouring to find a way of introducing one measure to meet the grievance in both countries. He advised us to possess our souls in peace as he would announce the Government's plan to the House on the following day.

Immediately I could get away, I rushed off to Edmonton, where I had arranged to address a large meeting in the Town Hall. It is a terrible journey, especially if you are in a hurry, as another rider, John Gilpin, found in days long before trams were invented, and I did not arrive there until the meeting was nearly over.

The chairman whispered to me that there were two agents of large estates in the audience, and that these men had caused most of the trouble in the district, and that they were either local councillors or aspirants to that position.

I thought I could not do better than to address my remarks to them. I implored them to come upon the platform like good-hearted men and inform their tenants that they had withdrawn their notices to quit and increases of rent as many of the best landlords

had done. I promised them the high distinction of shaking them by the hand, and would even treat them like a brother sovereign and kiss them on the cheek if they so desired. They could have anything they liked if they would only behave like patriotic Englishmen. I promised that the audience would receive them with musical honours and would rise and sing, "For he's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us." Nothing, however, would move them, not even the distinction of being the most popular men in Edmonton, for that evening at least. I turned to the Chairman and said I did not believe that any agents were present, otherwise they could not refuse such offers, whereupon the whole audience rose and pointed to the two men, who certainly looked more humble than when they were mounted on their tenants' doorsteps. Finally, after giving them all this time for consideration, I took the pleasure of announcing Mr. Walter Long's statement that the Government's decision to introduce a Bill would be made public next day, and that through their hesitation, for which they could not blame me or the meeting, they would now be conscripts and would forfeit all respect paid to those who had willingly acted in a decent manner to their tenants.

CHAPTER X

FIRST RENT ACT, 1915

THE Increase of Rent and Mortgage Interest (Restrictions) Bill was introduced into Parliament by Mr. Walter Long and read for the first time on November 25th, 1915.

Mr. Long, in referring to our deputation, said, "I have received a great many deputations and had a great many interviews. Perhaps the most interesting deputation was that which I saw a short time ago. It was a body of gentlemen representing both the owners and tenants. The House may forgive me if I use simple familiar terms in a different relationship when I say that this deputation represented the most Tory opinion on the side of the owners and the most advanced opinion on the side of those who were desiring to deal with the ownership question in a particular way. Therefore they were a very representative deputation, and they presented their case to me and assured me that if we acted somewhat on those lines they would see no reason to dispute the justice of our action."

The first draft of the Bill was not at all satisfactory, for although it embodied the suggestions of our conference it did not extend to the whole country, nor to houses above the rental of £30 in England and £21 in Scotland. These limitations met with general opposition, and it is gratifying to look back to those days and see how men with such opposite views, as Sir Tudor Walters, Sir Francis Lowe, Sir Herbert

Nield, Mr. G. N. Barnes, Sir W. Joynson-Hicks, Mr. Boyton, and Mr. James Rowlands vied with each other in enlarging the measure to meet the needs of the time.

Throughout the month of December the Bill was discussed and amended in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and so great at that time was the goodwill and the desire to protect the people against profiteering, which was the characteristic note of Mr. Asquith's administration, that the Bill was passed without a single division being taken, and received the Royal Assent on December 23rd, 1915.

The main provisions of the Act were as follows. It applied to a house or part of a house let as a separate dwelling where the rental or rateable value did not exceed £35 in London, £30 in Scotland, and £26 elsewhere. By introducing the rateable value as an ultimate test, the Act applied to houses of an inclusive rental in London up to £1 2s. 6d. a week.

The standard rent was fixed as the rent paid on August 3rd, 1914, but if the house was empty at that date, the last rent before then was taken as the standard, and if first let after August 3rd, 1914, then the first rent at which it was let.

The permitted increases were six per cent. of the cost of structural alterations, but not for decorations or repairs, and an increase for rates corresponding to any increase that the landlord had to pay over what he paid at the beginning of the war.

No demands for premiums and key-money were allowed, nor were any indirect increases sanctioned by making the tenancy less favourable.

After November 25th, the date of the introduction of the Bill, all amounts above those permitted by the

Act were irrecoverable by the landlord, notwithstanding any agreement to pay them.

The mortgagee was also restricted to his pre-war rate of interest, and to conditions before he could exercise the right to foreclosure and sale.

The security of the tenant against ejectment was qualified in many ways. He had to pay the rent permitted by the Act, and to perform the conditions of his tenancy. He must not wilfully destroy the premises, nor be a nuisance and annoyance to adjoining occupiers. No decent tenant therefore need have any fear, unless the premises were reasonably required by the landlord for the occupation of himself or some person in his employ, or in the employ of some tenant from him, or upon some other ground that may be deemed satisfactory by the Court.

Looking at this now we see how feeble was the protection afforded to the tenant, but at that time, we all of us believed that this would safeguard the people's homes, more especially as wide powers of discretion were given to the County Court Judge in the administration of the Act, and it was felt that the intention and spirit that had animated Parliament in passing it would influence its interpretation.

It cannot be too much emphasised that this was an agreed measure between the best landlords and the best tenants to establish fair play and to ensure peace during the distressing days through which we were passing. It was a measure to restrain and restrict those who had no consideration for their fellows, to whom the accident of war suggested nothing but the idea of plunder.

On Christmas Eve the War Rents League had a special luncheon to celebrate the success of its efforts

in inducing the Government to present the tenants with such a useful Christmas gift, and we all felt that our work was now over. We had had four months of incessant toil, but four months of great enjoyment. Silver and gold had we none, but of ourselves and our time we gave freely. From start to finish our expenditure was only ten shillings, but never was there such a ten-shillings worth, for the result was an Act of Parliament, which, in spite of its defects, saved the landlords from ruin and saved the country from revolution, and which, during its duration, has been estimated to have benefited the tenants by no less than £300,000,000.

CHAPTER XI

INTERLUDE.

Now the Rent Act had passed through Parliament we all thought that the War Rents League had achieved its object, and we proceeded to look for other work to do.

In spite of my former rebuffs, I was still as anxious as ever to render what assistance I could to the Nation in the difficult task before it.

Soon after the war began, I saw a request from the Y.M.C.A. for volunteers to serve coffee to the troops in the trenches. Here, thought I, is my very job. I could already see my coffee-drinking den as the one touch of home and good cheer in the desert of destruction, and the one ray of faith and hope in the valley of despair. In high spirits I rushed to the office and offered my services.

The only person whom I could see, or who would see me, was an elderly gentleman whose long white silky beard reminded me of a picture I had once seen of Noah, and to him I explained my visit.

"What chapel do you attend?" said he, without looking up from the work he was engaged upon.

"None," said I. "What's that to do with it?"

"Then it's no good you coming here," he replied, with a snap of the jaw.

"I never asked to come here," I replied. "I thought you wanted someone to serve coffee at the front. I'll guarantee that the coffee will be all right, and also that the boys will get it. What's the chapel got to do with it?"

"You will have to pray with the troops, so you are no good to us," said he, waving me away.

"Is that all? That's quite easy," said I. "The aroma ascending from my coffee will be as fragrant as incense to all their deities. I will promise not to give offence to any of their gods."

"What do you mean, sir?" said Noah with indignation. "Their gods! I do not understand you."

"My coffee and my prayers will be welcome to all men, White or Black, Jew or Gentile, Hindoo or Mohammedan," I retorted. "My God is the Father of All, and not the keeper of a chapel coffee stall. Good day. You disappoint me. I hope you will learn better before the war is finished."

As I left I heard behind me a muttering that sounded like "Blasphemer." I have no knowledge of the quality of the coffee that was served, but I do know that the tracts and services supplied with it produced more blasphemies than prayers, and that within two years an able American organiser had routed out the antediluvians and reformed the Association upon broad-minded lines, which enabled it to do a most magnificent work.

My next attempt at National Service met with no better results. A Member of Parliament, well acquainted with my knowledge of books in most European languages, said he could utilise my services in the War Office Library. He could not give me the post, but if I was passed by the Civil Service Commissioners and appointed to the War Office, he would transfer me to it. The Commissioners passed me without demur, and within a few days sent me word to attend one morning at the Admiralty.

I arrived there punctually at ten o'clock, and I had

a most interesting wait for more than an hour, in a funny little place that resembled a series of cabins in an old wooden ship. To add to this resemblance, a number of old tars, who might have been boat-swains bold, or boatswains' mates, would roll about giving an occasional hitch to their blue trousers. And there were no end of boys, rushing in and out, and larking about, undoubted descendants of Captain Marryat's mud larks, but minus the mud.

One of the boys, the most industrious of them, let me into what had always been a profound mystery. I hope it is not a State secret as well, the divulgence of which is calculated to loosen one's ties of loyalty, but if these should depend upon tradition, and red tape has anything to do with their maintenance, I am prepared to take all risks.

I was initiated that morning into the secret of how so much red tape gets into Government departments. I discovered the young imp who prepares it and forces it upon our officials. This is how it is done. He takes a large roll of red substance and coils it lengthways around an oblong letter tray, and then cuts it across with a cutlass. When he has accumulated a huge pile of these lengths, he ladles out with a ruler a good helping or two into the letter trays for each department. It looks as though he was serving out pickled cabbage, and when later on I saw these trays of bright red strips in every room, crisp and fresh every morning, I almost fancied that the State supplied pickles for lunch. Upon reflection, red tape may be the chief ingredient of our many political pickles.

After this entertainment, I was ushered into a light and cheerful office, and handed over to a much

worried but extremely pleasant official. He studied my letter, said he did not know anything about me, and that he didn't want me. I, as frankly, told him I did not want to come there. All I wanted was to be sent across to the War Office, where they were waiting for me.

Not knowing what to do with me, and wanting to get me out of the way, he asked me if I could type.

"Yes," said I, "with one finger. Why?"

"Well, I hardly know what to do," he added perplexed. "You had better see if you can type this letter," and thereupon I was conducted into an adjoining room and introduced to the typewriter.

The machine fascinated me at once. It stood by itself in the centre of a large room, tall and majestic, like a monument erected to the memory of Oliver, Smith Premier, Underwood, or Remington, or of all of them together. It was a Long Tom in comparison with my little Gatling gun at home, and I was enchanted with it. I walked around it in admiration, and inspected it carefully. It looked something like a cooking stove with a dash of a bicycle and a sewing machine about it, and I should not have been surprised to find that it had a free wheel. At last I climbed up to the seat of a tall stool from which it had to be operated, and taking a piece of paper, I began to try all the handles and brakes to see how it worked. This was nearly my downfall. I became seriously interested, and after a preliminary canter, I started to copy the letter that had been given to me. With much care, but with only one finger, I made a copy that startled the office for accuracy and neatness, and almost led to me being condemned to be a

typist for life. My enthusiasm had found me out, so I had to make it quite clear that I was only interested in the machine for the moment, as in a new toy, and although I had stood their severest test, I could not waste any more time with the typewriter, as I was wanted at the Office of the Minister for War.

At length a compromise was reached. I was appointed to the Pigeon Department, and after a few days a transfer to the War Office might be arranged.

So, with a neat little card of admission, I found my way to the Pigeon Department of the Admiralty. It was at the top of a high old building near by. Thinking how appropriate that this department should be near the sky, I knocked at the door. After knocking several times, a gruff voice shouted, "Come in." To my surprise it was a little room, with a table in the centre covered with pink telegrams, at which an elderly officer in khaki was seated smoking his pipe, and talking to another elderly officer in khaki, also smoking a pipe, who stood before the fire warming himself.

I politely explained that I had been appointed to their department to assist them, and I showed my credentials.

"Get out," shouted the old bird before the fire. "We don't want you here."

"But let me stay for a few days," I pleaded, "it is not my desire to come here. I want to go to the War Office."

"Well, go, then," they both shouted. "We don't want you."

"Do let me stay," I again pleaded. "I won't upset you. I won't even disturb the pigeons. I was

sent to help you, so just find me something to do, and I am sure we will get on very well together."

"There is nothing to do in this office," said the one at the table.

"Then, gentlemen," I replied, "this is the job I have been looking for all my life, so don't be so hard-hearted as to send me away now I have found it."

"Are you going?" said the fireside soldier, "because if you don't soon hop it, I shall put you out. Go back to the fellow who sent you and tell him we return you with thanks, and ask him not to send any more people to disturb us."

With that, the two grey-headed warriors took me by the shoulders and threw me out upon the landing.

Like a carrier pigeon with its neck half wrung, I flew back to the Admiralty with my message, and I was advised to call upon the Commissioners and ask them to make a transfer, which could be done with a stroke of the pen.

At three o'clock, I called at Burlington Gardens, and asked to see the Secretary of the Commission. Upon hearing I had been sent by the Admiralty, I was shown into the first-class waiting room, and as the Secretary was out, was asked whether I would communicate my message to his confidential assistant. Within a few minutes he came to me, but before he had heard half my story he turned upon his heel impatiently, and started to leave the room. I suggested he might hear the whole of it, as he was only required to correct one word in the letter that had been sent to me. But he left abruptly, saying, he could not be bothered with such a trivial

matter. This began to look like a branch of the Pigeon Department, and whilst I was thinking that Government officials were almost as marvellous as the typewriter I had seen earlier in the day, and might possibly be worked better with one finger than with both hands, in walked a hustling little clerk.

"Er . . . you know, sir, . . . in cases like this, sir, . . .," he began, rubbing and smacking his hands together as though he were trying to sell me a new line in pyjamas.

"Yes, I know all about it," said I, anticipating trouble. "In cases like this you mean to say, 'beggars can't be choosers.' Well, this ain't no beggar, so you can cut that out, at once."

"Well . . . sir, . . . what I meant to say, er . . . was . . . er . . . that . . . er . . . in all these cases . . . er . . . we always appoint . . . er . . . our best men to the Admiralty," he smirked.

"Don't you think that is unfair?" I retorted. "Why not give Kitchener a chance? Here am I, one of your best men, upon your own admission, wanted at the War Office at once, so all you have to do is to send me there. I don't think it's fair to Kitchener to send him the worst men. If he loses the war don't blame me. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Er . . . well, sir . . . all I can suggest . . . er . . . is that you . . . er . . . write to us, and we will . . . er . . . consider it . . . er . . .," he stammered.

"How will you consider it? Favourably?" I inquired. "If not, writing will be of no use. This is an urgent matter, and I thought you would have attended to it at once, instead of wasting so much time. As it is, all your pigeons have struck in sympathy, there

is nothing doing in that department, so I shall expect a favourable reply to my letter by return."

With a promise that this procedure was merely a matter of form,—evidently they had just had their daily dose of red tape—like Mr. Pip, I left with great expectations.

Needless to say, no reply was vouchsafed to my letter, and after I had spent days in trying to overcome the error without success, Providence stepped in and found me other work to do.

Some time after the period I am now writing about I made another effort to place my services at the disposal of the country. Workers were required to look after the welfare of those employed upon munitions, to ease their difficulties and to keep the workshops cheerful. I had satisfied all the requirements, and was just about to be appointed, when the Archbishop of Canterbury, finding that his curates were at a loose end, offered them to the Government to undertake these very duties.

In my first attempt I was knocked out by the chapel, and in my last attempt by the church. They little knew that their actions were working towards a good end, to found a mission that neither of them would undertake.

CHAPTER XII

ATTEMPTS TO DEFEAT THE ACT

THREE weeks after Christmas, tired out with struggling against the red tape entanglements of Government departments, I was resting at home with a pipe and a book, when my wife aroused me by reading a paragraph from the evening paper. A correspondent was informed that an Act to protect tenants was still before Parliament, but no date could be given when it would become law. I bestirred myself at once, and sent a copy of the Act to the editor, telling him that it had been in print for a fortnight, and offering to give any information about it to his readers, if they would send a stamp for reply. At the same time I sent a similar letter to a number of other papers and wrote an article in *Reynolds'*. This again opened the floodgates, and I was once more overwhelmed, and the flow of letters from that time until now has never ceased.

The replies revealed the fact that the majority of people knew nothing about the provisions of the Act, and they also supplied the information, which astonished me still more, that the landlords and agents, whose conduct had called this measure forth, were not only ignoring it, but were deliberately misinterpreting it. From this moment, to enlighten the ignorant and to check the law breakers became our mission.

I had never been associated with an Act of Parliament before, and I was determined, now that our efforts had placed this one upon the Statute Book, that it should not be made a dead letter. As the

country evidently did not require my services, it looked as though Providence had found me a job by calling me to undertake this special war work that no one else was prepared to do, to save the people and their homes from destruction.

In this spirit was this mission of personal service entered upon and conducted. No charge has been made, no fee or reward has been asked, no matter how great the benefit rendered. Those assisted have been simply asked to help others as others have enabled us to help them.

Our object was not to found a great Union of Tenants, with palatial offices in London and branches throughout the land, with a list of titled patrons and presidents, and a large staff of clerks and canvassers busily engaged in raking in subscriptions. Our desire was to preserve the peace at home, to protect the homes of the little people, and to give freely our personal services in this connection, to anyone in need of them, landlord and tenant alike.

This disinterested attitude has been our greatest asset. It completely confounded our opponents, who were out for all they could get, and therefore could not understand people who were out for all they could give. It has perplexed astute politicians, who imagined it to be a "stunt," an easy way to catch the female vote, until they found that we were above all party considerations, and would support and accept help from anyone who was with us, whatever his political colour might be.

Although contributions have been few and debts many, yet through advice constantly given to War Pensions Committees, Citizens' Associations, Co-operative Societies, Ex-Service Men's Clubs, Liberal

and Radical Associations, Labour Party Organisations, Trade Unions, Unemployed Workmen's Societies and Tenants' Defence Leagues, it has been possible for us to enlighten and help millions of tenants and sub-tenants who were in doubt and difficulty.

In this way the War Rents League has been the representative body of reasonable tenants, who were more concerned in carrying out the spirit of the law than in the meticulous application of the letter of it. Our aim has been to play the game and to secure fair play all round.

The first attack upon the Act was made by agents who refused to adjust their rents to the pre-war standard and who persistently tried to enforce the payment of increases declared illegal. They advanced all kinds of specious arguments to their tenants to show that the Act did not apply to them. To some they said it only applied to houses that were mortgaged, to others that it applied to houses that were not mortgaged, and when the rent was over 13/6 a week in London, being over £35 a year, that any rent could be charged and tenants ejected if it were not paid, for the rateable value mentioned in the Act did not matter at all.

They would twist and turn every way as occasion served them. And when all this talk was of no avail, they would enter the unpermitted increases, which the tenant refused to pay, as arrears of rent. Some would still further increase the rent so as to make the so-called arrears amount to a large sum, and then threaten the tenants by means of letters from solicitors. When this had no effect, bailiffs would even distrain upon the furniture without asking

leave of the Court. During the first six months of 1916, pandemonium reigned. The Judges and the Registrars of the Courts seemed to be in a daze, and to be afraid to administer the Act of Parliament in favour of the tenants in whose interests it was passed. Some of them said it had to be interpreted strictly, and this was found to mean strictly against the tenant. From the number of appeals for help that I received, I could see that the Rent Act was being turned into a formidable weapon of intimidation against tenants. Hearing of the way they were being treated in the Courts, tenants were in dread of legal proceedings coupled with the threat of having to pay heavy costs, which meant the loss of their homes, as well as the loss of a roof over their heads. They had only protection in theory, but not in practice.

As a result of this, local tenants' associations sprang up in every direction, and we encouraged them, and gave them every support. I recall a meeting held at Southall about this time, to explain the Act, that was attended by several hundred people, and was presided over by Councillor James Cully, and addressed by Sir A. W. Yeo and myself. In and around this district many of our first cases were fought.

Our first case was brought to my notice by Mr. Maurice Leahy, a prominent member of the National Union of Railwaymen, who has since built up for himself a solid reputation as a Labour Councillor upon the Chiswick Council.

One of his branch members had an ejectment order hanging over his head, given on the ground that the landlord reasonably required the house for his own occupation. This railway worker had a wife and five

children, and his great crime was that he had refused to pay the illegal increase of rent demanded of him. The case had been heard since the passing of the Rent Act, and the Judge had held that as the landlord, who was a landlady in this instance, reasonably required the house to live in, the tenant had no defence, and that the trouble about the rent did not enter into the case at all. It appeared that the landlady had not attended the Court, and the tenant did not know who she was, as the summons had been taken out in the name of the agent, whose word was accepted that the landlord wanted to live there.

The tenant brought this matter up to a branch meeting of his Union, and a committee was formed, with Mr. Leahy at the head, to keep their fellow member in the house. This committee waited upon Mr. Wardle at the House of Commons, and he advised them to see me and to ask me to re-open the case. If the Court would not set the order aside, he promised to raise the question in the House upon the adjournment.

We had only three days before the warrant could be issued, so an application at the County Court had to be made without delay, and I set out to find a solicitor to undertake it. Although money was forthcoming to pay the fees, I could find no one willing to help us. Most of the solicitors applied to, said the Judge had full discretion to make such an order, and when once made he would not go back upon it.

I was at my wit's end to know what to do, when I was told to ring up Mr. Charles Robinson of Hounslow. He consented at once to act for the tenant if I would bring the man to see him the next afternoon to receive instructions from him.

The man was so distressed that he could not work, and he kept running in to see me to know how he stood. At lunch time he decided to knock off work and go home to see how his wife was getting on, as she was in despair. We had no direct evidence that the landlady did not require to live in the house, but there had been rumours in the neighbourhood that the house was to be let to another tenant. I therefore asked him to send some person, who lived in another district and was unknown to the agent, to call at the agent's office, preferably when he was out, and ask his clerk if they had any houses to let and at what rents, and to get the offer of several in writing. By casually asking if there were any in the road in which my friend lived, his house might be amongst those given.

When I called upon him later in the day, I found he had managed his detective work admirably. A soldier's wife was present who had visited the agent's office and had been given several slips of paper with the addresses of houses to let and the rents required, and amongst them was this very address with the rent doubled. She was told she could not have this particular house until the end of the week, when the tenant was vacating it.

We placed these facts in Mr. Robinson's hands, and his colleague, Mr. Williams, confronted the agent with them in court. The Judge merely granted the application rescinding the order, saying there had evidently been some mistake, but he carefully refrained from uttering one word against the methods employed by the agent to defeat the intentions of Parliament.

Outside the Court the agent was not at all abashed.

He bragged that he had got six orders for possession, and he could afford to lose one of them. If we thought he was going to be frightened by Acts of Parliament we were mistaken. They were only passed to be got round or broken, and he was not going to miss the chance of a lifetime to make a bit, through the interference of busybodies like me. I could do my worst, he would see me—evicted—first.

I had not thought of interfering with him before, and his suggestion was a welcome idea. So I set out to find the other tenants. Eventually, I discovered two of them, and straight away we put in applications for the orders against them to be set aside. As luck would have it, I found that both of their houses had been offered to the soldier's wife at the same time as the railway man's house.

When the agent saw me outside the Court he begged and even implored me not to go on with the proceedings. If we would withdraw them, he would pay all costs and give an undertaking not to molest these tenants again. I refused to have anything to do with him unless he also withdrew all proceedings against the other three tenants, and when I had this in writing to each tenant and had handed the withdrawals into the Court, I let him go. I visited the other tenants. They lived in poor little houses, and their husbands were away at the war. One house was let out in two flats, and the young wives informed me that a man had called one day and said he was a solicitor, and told them he was buying their house to live in as he had been looking about for such a nice little place for a long time. He gave each of the children a shilling and told the women to look out for another place as soon as possible, as he

did not want any trouble and they must not forget that he was a solicitor and could put them to great expense if they did not go. They had seen nothing of him since and did not even know his name. The agent had sworn in Court that the landlord wanted to live there and they had been unable to say a word as they did not know anything about him. What a lovely game played slowly, in which the tenant stood to be the loser and the agent the gainer every time!

Mr. Charles Robinson was a God-send to us in those days. A more just and gentlemanly solicitor I had not met until then, and it was a pleasure to be associated with him in these battles, and that pleasure has increased with the years.

Whilst this was taking place at one end of London, at Woolwich, the extreme limit the other way, the difficulty was intense, owing to the influx of Government workers. But the Woolwich Labour Party were in charge of the campaign here, and not for one moment did they ever lose their head. Councillor W. Barefoot and Miss Crout have guided it through a rent and housing crisis such as few places have experienced, with great wisdom and discretion. If it had been mishandled, the troubles on the Clyde would have been child's play to what would have happened here.

In these early days, I was often at Woolwich, where I found the solicitors rather shy, and very good friends with the agents and landlords around. It was with some difficulty that I could get them to present the tenants' cases with any enthusiasm. And yet, it was most necessary, as a Deputy Judge was officiating there at that time. In my experience, with but one exception, Deputy Judges seem to be so

timid and self-conscious that they are afraid to show they are human beings, in case this might re-act against their reputation as lawyers. Possession orders were being granted for the flimsiest reasons. In one case a family was ordered to get out of their house because the landlord had failed to make an illegal increase of two shillings a week, and it was considered reasonable by the Judge that he should have possession because he was paying more rent where he lived, and had lived for years, than his tenant paid to him.

Whilst at Enfield, London's extreme limit in the North, in spite of the exertions of Mr. McGrath of the Workers' Union, the rent ramp was going full swing. Increases had become a weekly custom, and they were being enforced ruthlessly. Several tenants had been summoned whilst the Act was passing through Parliament, and the Judge had made orders against them for possession, but had suspended their execution as long as they paid the increased rent into Court every Monday morning. They had to travel miles to pay this rent, so when the Act was passed we applied for the order to be discharged, as the increases were declared by law illegal. Three times were different applications made to this end, and upon each occasion were they dismissed with heavy costs against the tenants. The Judge told them that in his opinion they were not paying nearly enough rent, and that he disapproved of the Act entirely. He had purposely made this order in this way so that when the Act was passed, they would be compelled to pay the increases their landlord demanded, or be turned out by the order of the Court.

The outlook seemed to be hopeless. Parliament

seemed to be at the mercy of the judiciary. Members of Parliament felt helpless. They advised appeals to the High Court and to the House of Lords, but no one was willing to come forward to foot the bill.

A direct attack would serve no purpose, so we decided upon a flank movement, and we got all the distressed tenants to send detailed accounts of their cases to the Lord Chancellor, the President of the Local Government Board, and to their Member of Parliament. The constant dropping of these instances of injustice upon their exalted heads, well rubbed in with questions in Parliament, gradually produced some effect upon the course of justice.

I do not wish it to be understood that the instances I have given represented the attitude of the County Court Judges generally. I sat at their feet daily in one Court after another and tried to look at the Act through their eyes. I found that they seemed to experience some difficulty in the interpretation of it, and were not sure of the extent of their powers of discretion. I noticed that when a tenant was faced by the landlord's solicitor with a point of law, many Judges merely turned to the tenant and asked him what he had to say about it. To him the whole thing was double Dutch, and if the Judge was not particularly interested in the point raised, the landlord's contention was accepted and the tenant was the loser. And yet at other times, the same Judge would take infinite pains to argue out the most difficult points put forward and protect the tenant who was not represented. I carefully analysed my experiences, and I found a growing sympathy with the Judges in the execution of their difficult duties. I began to be more interested in adverse judgments

than in those given in the tenant's favour, as these set problems to be solved whereby I could ascertain what was at the back of the Judge's mind, and suggest means of strengthening the law.

But, by now, I was in deadly earnest. I was more determined than I had ever been, that the spirit of this Act should be carried out. Nothing else on earth mattered, everything must give way to this one end. I had overcome the difficulties of Parliamentary procedure by a close study during the previous year, and as I was now faced with the procedure of the County Court, I applied myself to that. I bought a copy of the Annual County Court practice and made myself acquainted with its thousand and more pages, paying particular attention to those bearing upon landlord and tenant and plaints and applications. I re-read "The Laws of Evidence" with more understanding from my recent experiences, and even carried "Woodfall's Landlord and Tenant" nightly to bed with me. But the more I read, the more convinced I became that the little tenant had no chance unless he was represented. I must, therefore, find a solicitor or preferably a barrister who would be able to state the defendant's case and assist the Court to a better understanding of the Act. As I was not permitted to assist even the very poorest without the express sanction of the Court, which in most cases was not willingly granted, and as I could not qualify to do so in the time, owing to the most stringent trade union rules on earth, my immediate problem was to trust in Providence to lead me to the men who could give the necessary help.

CHAPTER XIII

NOTICES TO QUIT IN THE TRENCHES

I CHANCED to meet a friend one day and explained my difficulties to him, and he took me by the arm and led me to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and introduced me to a solicitor. Upon hearing of the distress being caused to soldiers' families and their inability to obtain legal assistance, he at once volunteered to give every help in his power, and he introduced me to a barrister, Mr. H. S. Schultess-Young.

This was the turning point in our struggle.

For many years I had known of Mr. Schultess-Young's reputation as being the defender of the bottom dog. As an Anti-Vaccinator, his name was known throughout the length and breadth of the land through the thousands of cases he successfully fought in order that the Act for exemption should not be rendered ineffective. He was a Master of Arts of Balliol College, Oxford, a pupil of the great Dr. Jowett, and it is not surprising that his humane sympathies, combined with his skill in advocacy and cross-examination, should have resulted in the great majority of cases being decided in favour of the tenants, and many important parts of the Rent Acts being interpreted in a more generous manner.

No better man could have been found to defend these poor people. It was charming to see the way in which he acted as a father to them, freely giving his services in all cases on behalf of soldiers' families where great injustice was likely to be done, and where intricate legal points might possibly be raised.

There is no County Court in London, and for miles around, in which Mr. Schultess-Young has not fought and won for the tenant, and during these eight years he has travelled, fighting in our cause, from Swansea to Southend, and from Sheffield to Southampton.

Before long, agents and solicitors found that it was not quite so easy as they had imagined to break through the Act, and get possession of their houses. Instead of having to face a poor ignorant woman, who had never set foot inside a court before, they suddenly found themselves up against an astute counsel dressed in wig and gown. Instead of the slaughter of the defenceless which they had imagined they would witness, they found themselves enduring the treatment they had intended for their victims. We even treated them better than they would have treated us. In those days costs granted to the tenant were so small that they were not worth collecting, so we were always content with getting the case dismissed. As long as the tenant was left unmolested we were not concerned about punishing the landlord or agent. We concentrated upon those cases where an attempt was made to turn the tenant out, because the security of the tenant was the only real thing worth fighting for. Once that was impaired, the other portions of the Act were worthless.

At this moment a peculiar difficulty arose in the Midlands owing to an increase in rent on account of an increase in the rates. The landlord had placed twopence or threepence upon the rent to meet this rate increase since the beginning of the war, and before the passing of the Act, and the increase had been paid by the tenants without a murmur. These tenants were not those who were subjected to the

exorbitant increases that had necessitated Parliamentary interference. There was no doubt that it was a just increase, and there was no suggestion upon the part of the tenants that they could not pay it. Up to November 25th, 1915, the Act said they were bound to pay it, but after that date the landlord ought to have served his tenants with a notice under the Act giving particulars of how it was arrived at. As the amount was not in dispute, it seemed a trivial point to raise, but some tenants seeing a chance of obtaining a few shillings to which they were not morally entitled, but which they could legally recover, acted like little Shylocks in demanding their pound of flesh. As the landlords had actually paid these amounts out upon their tenants' behalf, this demand more resembled one for blood than flesh. In order that the spirit of the law should be observed rather than the exact letter, I wrote a number of letters to the most important papers in the Midlands begging tenants to act reasonably, and from indications I received I believe that the majority of them accepted my advice.

At Manchester, as well, a similar trouble arose about the rates, and a landlord there wrote asking me my advice. The amount concerned was only about fourpence a week, so I advised him to split the difference and reduce the increase to twopence a week until the end of the war, whether the rates rose or fell. To my astonishment he replied that this was the proposal he had made a week before, and he enclosed a printed circular proving it. His tenants would not accept this compromise, and I went to Manchester to see if I could amicably settle matters.

In looking through this landlord's books I was

astonished to find that in many instances pre-war rents of ten shillings a week had been reduced to six shillings and eightpence, and upon inquiry I discovered that these were the rents of houses where the husband had been killed in the war. To help his country and to aid recruiting, this genuinely patriotic landlord had voluntarily imposed upon himself a tax by informing his tenants that if in the service of their country they lost their life he would look after their wives and families and ease their burden by reducing their rents by one third as long as they lived there. Many may say that such deeds are exceptional, but I am inclined to believe that they were not uncommon with the best class of property owner, who does not advertise his good works, and could only be met with by accident.

Mr. E. J. Churchman, Mr. Brierley, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Levy and other property owners met Mr. W. Mellor, the tenants' secretary, and myself in conference, and I believe that this meeting helped both camps to understand each other better.

The position of middle-class tenants was also attracting our attention, as short leases and agreements, upon which their houses were held were beginning to run out. So far there had not been any great pressure upon them, as middle-class people generally had been hit hard and had difficulty in paying their usual rents, especially where the husband had volunteered for service.

The Rent Act did not safeguard the middle-class soldier's home in any way, and as Compulsory Military Service was being hurried through Parliament, I took the opportunity at a conference called by the Housing and Town Planning Council at

Caxton Hall in April, 1916, to consider home problems after the war, to move a resolution to prevent these problems from becoming worse.

The resolution I moved was, "That this Congress is of opinion that the only equitable way of preserving the homes of men called to the Navy and Army is by the Government making the necessary provision out of national revenue." This was seconded by my friend, Mr. J. Silas Whybrew, the Secretary of the Workmen's National Housing Council, and was carried unanimously. The next step was the appointment of a Committee of which Mr. H. R. Aldridge was secretary, which interviewed the Government and worked out a scheme that received sanction in the following month, by which Civil Liability Commissioners were appointed to make grants to men serving in His Majesty's Forces, who were unable to meet their financial liabilities, in respect of rent, mortgage interest, instalments for the purchase of house or furniture, rates and taxes, insurance premiums and school fees.

A little latter in the year, trouble broke out in an unexpected direction. Chaplains with the troops at the front started sending me distressing letters from the wives of the soldiers in their regiments, containing notices to quit. They said the men were distracted, and had come to them for advice, and they asked me to look into the matter and to protect their wives and families. I wrote to the women to come and see me, or if they were near I called upon them and cheered them up by promising to look after them. I found that their petty landlords were adopting petty methods to frighten them out in order to get more rent from another tenant, and in

all these instances we taught the landlord a lesson. When, however, the letters from the front concerned tenants living as far away as Newcastle-on-Tyne, South Shields, Ashton-under-Lyne, and towns in the Midlands and the West of England, the matter became more difficult. The letters from the Chaplains become more numerous; I must have received two hundred in all. The Chaplains did not spare themselves in their men's behalf. Several wrote me stinging letters asking what these landlords were up to, as their men were beside themselves upon receipt of such letters from home, and they were threatening to return to England and finish off the landlords, and then come back to Flanders and polish off the Germans.

My inquiries showed that the bulk of these notices to quit, especially from the provinces, were merely formal notices terminating tenancies before an increase of rent was made on account of the rise in rates. It is interesting to note that during this period the boroughs in London gradually reduced their rates, whilst the towns in the country slightly increased them.

As some of the tenants in the Midlands had disputed their small rent increases, the landlords had decided to serve them all with notices to regulate matters. This meant that the country was going to be swamped regularly twice a year with millions of notices to quit, and that before long every man fighting in the trenches would receive one every six months. Such a state of things could not be tolerated, as our Army would think they were being attacked by their own countrymen in the rear, so I decided to approach the property owners who were

causing the trouble and try to effect some alteration.

Whilst in the gallery of the House of Commons during the debates upon the Rent Act, I met Mr. A. W. Shelton, the President of the National Federation of Property Owners, and we became acquainted. He had been at our conference at Mr. Aldridge's office, and had also made one of the deputation to Mr. Walter Long, that had caused the Bill to be introduced, but until now we had not exchanged words. We soon became very friendly, and often during the passage of the Bill through Parliament we discussed many points about which we were at variance, and tried to find means of getting justice for both sides. I was greatly impressed with his desire for fair play, and his earnest endeavour to do to others as he would be done by.

What Mr. Edwin Evans was to the property owners in London, Mr. Shelton was in relation to those of the Midlands and the North. He was President of the Federation of Property Owners embracing the whole of England and Wales, and this prominent and responsible position he held throughout the war, until last year, when he was succeeded by Mr. Churchman of Manchester. It was no easy position to fill, especially in such times, requiring quick judgment and exceptional tact, and Mr. Shelton possessed not only these in a marked degree, but also the rare gift of appreciating beneath technical details and business consideration the humane principles involved. In a word, he saw the homes through the houses.

Being confronted with these letters from soldiers in the firing line, I therefore communicated with Mr. Shelton and laid the whole matter before him. He

was impressed with the importance of stopping the anxiety caused to the men and their families.

"I hardly know what to do," said he. "It seems to me that I must terminate the tenancy before I can increase the rent."

"Why not act as you did before the war?" I suggested. "You rarely if ever gave your tenants notice to quit then, if you wanted to raise the rent. You would simply tell Mrs. Jones that the rates had risen and that her rent would be threepence a week more after next week. If Mrs. Jones paid the increase, she would thereby acknowledge that she had surrendered her old tenancy, and had accepted a new one at the increased rental. But if Mrs. Jones refused to pay the increase, you then resorted to the services of a notice to quit, so as to give her the option of either removing or paying what you asked. If she remained after the expiry of the notice to quit, she would have to pay the increased amount, or you could turn her out."

"That seems to be an accurate account of the usual practice before the war," he replied, "but how does the Rent Act affect it?"

"There is nothing in the Act about a notice to quit, or about terminating the tenancy," I replied. "The only difference the Act makes is that it provides that a written notice with particulars has to be given and four weeks allowed before the increase becomes due. If the notice of increase is valid, and the tenant pays, he has surely accepted it. If valid, and he does not pay, you must serve a notice to quit to enforce payment. If the notice is not valid, then the tenant need not pay the increase, and even if it had been preceded by a notice to quit it would

not hold good, as all the illegal payments can be recovered."

"Your argument seems to me quite sound," said Mr. Shelton. "What is more, it does away with the services of these notices to quit that are causing so much trouble. I would do anything rather than give distress to our men and their families. I realise what I should feel if I were at the front and my wife sent me such a notice. I will call together the members of my Committee and lay the matter before them, and I think they will agree to discontinue such notices in future."

Mr. Shelton kept his word. His Committee agreed to his suggestion, and within a few weeks the anxiety in the trenches, which in some cases had almost led to mutiny, was settled.

I have dealt with this episode in some detail for later it will be found that this considerate action was turned against the landlords by unscrupulous agitators who were ignorant of the reasons that had caused it.

One of the first cases that Mr. Schultess-Young undertook for us was brought about by the Judge of an East End Court making an order for a man to be turned out, as he was paying thirteen shillings and sixpence a week rent, inclusive of rates, ruling that as this amounted to £35 2s. a year, his house came outside the protection of the Act, which only extended to houses of £35 a year. The Judge expressed his sympathy for the tenant, and said he was sorry he could not help him.

I wrote to the Judge, saying that I could not believe that the newspaper report was correct, and I enclosed a copy of the Act, marking the passage

where the rateable value of the house was the test of its applicability. The Judge returned my copy of the Act and thanked me for calling his attention to the rateable value, adding that he had overlooked it, and he was afraid he must have done so in other cases, but he would now know better in future.

I discovered the tenant, who, as usual, was a man with a large family, and had lived in the house for many years. The premises, which were rated at £19 a year, had recently been purchased with the house next door, by a woman who kept a general shop in another part of London, and who had done so well since the beginning of the war, that she had started speculating with her profits in small house property. She had owned the houses only a month, and wanted to clear the tenants out so as to let at higher rents.

I advised the man to make an application in person to the Judge for the order to be set aside on the ground that the house came within the Act. To our surprise the Judge said he was unable to correct his own mistake, and therefore the tenant would have to get out of the house at the time stated. Thereupon our solicitor briefed Mr. Schultess-Young to see what he could do. The Judge stuck to his point, and after long argument, in which much case law was quoted, and in which all the barristers present were interested and took part, the Judge consented to grant leave to appeal, and to stay the execution of the warrant if the appeal was set down that day. What was more, he promised to do all he could to assist the tenant by stating to the High Court that the error should be corrected and ought never to have been made.

The appeal was entered and served the same day upon the agents who nearly had a fit.

“What! Appeal about a miserable little house like this? We never heard of such a thing!” they exclaimed.

The next morning, however, they were waiting at the solicitor’s office before he arrived, and they withdrew all proceedings against the tenant.

Such was the nature of some of the difficulties tenants were encountering, and if it had not been for expert advice and advocacy the Act would have been a mere scrap of paper within the year.

CHAPTER XIV

RECOVERY OF EXCESS PAYMENTS

As the home was the real fighting base of the nation, everything that happened struck back at it sooner or later. Whenever a battleship was sunk with the loss of large numbers of men, the War Rents League was sure to hear of it before the country had any general knowledge of such a calamity.

Letters would pour into us from the ports where the crews lived, written by the sailor's wives, enclosing notices to quit from their landlords, expressing grief on the one hand at the death of their husbands, and informing them on the other hand that as they would not now be able to pay the rents, they would have to vacate the houses. In some cases these women were told that they were now no longer tenants because the house was in their husband's names.

In some parts of London no soldier's wife could obtain a tenancy as it was feared that her husband might make the great sacrifice of his life, so that it was considered to be better business to let to munition workers.

By this time there were no empty houses to be found, even those that had stood dilapidated for years, too bad for any tenant to inhabit, had been taken as shelters. Munition works had sprung up in all quarters, down every back street, and the refugees were being placed to work for the allied cause in many districts. As soon as these were assured of jobs, they would flock throughout the

neighbourhood, offering bank notes as premiums for houses and creating terror among the residents. Agents were keen upon those notes, and were prepared to stop at nothing in their attempts to obtain them. A large number of ignorant tenants must have been driven out of their homes at this time, for within a year I was inundated with refugees endeavouring to get the exorbitant rents they had agreed to pay adjusted to the legal amount.

The year's fight against the worst profiteering element in the country, without any support from anyone but my Committee, had so reduced my own resources that I was compelled to close up the business I was trying to hold together until the war was over. The artists, whom I had assisted, and their friends came to the rescue, and through the efforts of Jo Davidson, Joe Simpson, and Holbrook Jackson, formerly editor of "*T. P.'s Weekly*," a tombola was organised to enable me to continue the fight.

For the first time in my life I was free. I had sold all that I had and given it to the poor. The decks were clear, and I could now go into action without the least fear.

A friend lent me the use of his office, and I proceeded at once to agitate for a new Act of Parliament. The Rent Act, upon which we had relied so much, had, during the year, in spite of all our work, been riddled to pieces, and was becoming hardly worth the paper upon which it was printed. Tenants who were weak and ignorant, and these were ninety-nine out of every hundred, were being robbed and bullied daily by landlords and their hired agents. When tenants discovered the War Rents League and learned their legal position, the

agents merely sneered and said they were entitled to keep all the excess rent they could obtain by bullying and false representation, as the ignorant women had paid it in ignorance of the law and could not therefore recover it.

No Registrar or Judge of any County Court, I am happy to say, ever sanctioned this view. The first case upon this point was fought by the War Rents League before the Registrar at the Uxbridge County Court, and we gained the day, publishing the result in leaflets throughout the country. But there happened to be a pedantic lawyer with nothing better to do, who agitated in the law papers against our judgment, and eventually his contention was advanced in the noted case of "*Sharp Bros. & Knight v. Chant*," at Birmingham. Both the Registrar and the Judge of this Court took the view that the tenant could recover all illegal increases paid since November 25th, 1915, and the landlords appealed to the Divisional Court, who endorsed that view. The landlords then took the case further to the Court of Appeal, and upon the technical issue that the tenant had paid the excess in ignorance of law, instead of in ignorance of fact, the Appeal Judges decided that the landlords were entitled to all that they had extracted from the tenant, in spite of this Act restricting the rent that could be lawfully demanded.

Mr. Mardy Jones (now M. P. for Pontypridd) in South Wales, and Mr. W. Mellor in Manchester were bravely trying to stem the tide in the interests of the tenants, and as both were active members of the Labour Party, and had facts and figures to their fingers' ends concerning the attacks upon the Act, we decided that the best course to adopt was to place

all our information before the Labour Party, and get them to lead the fight in Parliament.

Accordingly I had an interview with Mr. J. S. Middleton, the Secretary of the Labour Party, and he, as ever, was full of wise suggestions and advice. Mr. Middleton is one of the hardest worked men in London, bothered and badgered by everyone who thinks he has an idea, yet he has the coolest head and the sweetest temper of anyone I have met.

Labour's great fighting man, the late Mr. W. C. Anderson, was given charge of this campaign, and he threw himself into it with his heart and soul, as into everything he ever did.

Seeing no possibility of the Government giving facilities for a separate Bill, we decided to try to insert some amending clauses in a Courts (Emergency) Powers Bill that had just been introduced. So upon April 2nd, 1917, Mr. Anderson moved an amendment in Committee to insert a new clause to make the Rent Act watertight, and to place it beyond the shadow of a doubt that the tenant had a legal right to recover any amount paid by him in excess of that laid down by the law. Mr. George Wardle was able, from the knowledge of how railwaymen had been treated, to give some telling illustrations of what was taking place, and Sir A. W. Yeo put in a word against supposed arrears being entered in rent books. Sir Gordon Hewart (now the Lord Chief Justice) was completely in sympathy and promised to draft amendments on behalf of the Government to meet the case. And upon the following day he proposed a clause that provided for the return of any rent or mortgage interest paid after November 25th, 1915, in excess of the amounts laid down in the Rent

Act, and also that these sums could be recovered by deduction from any rent payable to the landlord. He also imposed a penalty of £10 upon conviction against any person making an entry in any rent book or receipt showing or purporting to show that any tenant was in arrears in respect of any sum which by virtue of the Act was irrecoverable, and refusing to delete it when requested by or on behalf of the tenant.

An attempt was made by the landlords upon the report stage of the Bill to limit the recovery of over-paid amounts to those paid after the passing of this Act, and thus turn the intention of the clause by legalising all that the unscrupulous landlords had hitherto extracted from the tenants. This was defeated in the House of Commons, only to be renewed with vigour, and with what at first looked like success, in the House of Lords.

This obstruction made the fight more interesting. The whole country required again to be aroused to the issue at stake. Money was needed to circularise all the workers' organisations in order to bring pressure to bear upon Parliament not to give way.

The League had no funds for such an effort, so I put on my thinking cap, and in the language of the great politicians, I "explored every avenue" of my mind to see how the necessary could be raised.

A short time before this, after Mr. Lloyd George had become Prime Minister, I went to the Central Hall, Westminster, to hear him make one of his rousing speeches. As I was coming away, I met a friend, a journalist upon an important London paper, and we stopped to compare notes about the speech. We were both impressed with the peroration, and I

remarked that I had been struck with its resemblance to translations I had read of Welsh poetry. I was inclined to believe that Mr. Lloyd George composed his speeches in Welsh and then translated them, unconsciously it might be, as there seemed to be a flavour in them of the rhythm of Taliesin and the old Welsh Bards.

"If I were your editor," said I, "I would arrange this peroration in the style of free verse, and frame it in the middle of the front page, and call it 'Lloyd George's War Song.' Tell him I present him with that idea."

Needless to say the editor did not think much of it, and that was a bit of luck for me. My thinking cap brought it back to my mind, and I at once sat down and went through piles of newspapers turning Mr. Lloyd George's speeches, where possible, into free verse, and making war songs of them.

The next morning I had quite a number that read well, and seemed to gain fire and sparkle by the new setting. So I took them to town and called upon Mr. Grant Richards, as I knew him to be a sportsman, and told him that I required to raise a certain sum to carry on our fight. I wanted the money down, and if he could help me he should have the manuscript in a fortnight. He listened to my proposition, which was to compile a book of extracts, called "The Wit and Wisdom of Lloyd George," and to incorporate the war songs. He consented, then and there, to publish the book, and he handed me the money I required.

That, however, was the easiest part of the matter. For, as soon as I came to get to work, I found I had bitten off almost more than I could chew. I devoted

a fortnight, from early morning to closing time, at the British Museum, turning up every book upon Mr. Lloyd George and every speech he had ever made. I became enthralled with my subject, and when I discovered that he had said that his earliest recollection was being turned out of house and home with his mother and brothers by the bailiff, after his father's death, and that this would never be effaced from his memory, I felt convinced that he, of all men, would approve the use to which his words were being placed. I failed to keep my bargain, as at the end of the fortnight I still had to wade through no less than 365 volumes of Hansard to extract the drops of wisdom that had at times both enchanted and annoyed the House of Commons. The Prime Minister's Secretary obtained permission for an unpublished portrait to be used for the cover, and the book was a success. I received an appreciative note from Monsieur Clemenceau, who was no bad judge of vigorous speech, and who, no doubt, supplied the music to the British Prime Minister's war songs.

No sooner had this trouble been overcome than another replaced it. Upon going to my office one day I found a strange man there, who scowled at me and asked me who I might be?

I told him. Whereupon he said, "Then you are the person who has been interfering between me and my tenants at such a place?"

To which I replied, "Then you must be the landlord who has been threatening these people with eviction if they will not submit to your unjust demands?"

The result was that my friend was informed that he would be turned out if he did not turn me out, as

this person was also the landlord of the offices. There was nothing for it but to promise to go, and I made a bargain with him that as soon as the new Act was through the House of Lords his premises should no longer be troubled by me.

For the next month there were numerous consultations with Members of Parliament and representations to Ministers, and at the end of June the War Rents League petitioned Lord Rhondda, then President of the Local Government Board, to receive a deputation.

Lord Rhondda sent a message to me one afternoon asking me to call and see him at once because the Bill was to come up again the next day. He explained that as there was no time to receive a deputation he thought I might be able to place its views before him. After I had stated our case, he said, "Why not let the clauses stand as they have left the House? We have been very liberal and given you one clause whereby the landlord can be fined for entering arrears in rent books."

"I do not think that assists your argument, Sir," I said. "You intend to fine the man who is unsuccessful in obtaining the illegal rent and resorts to entering so-called arrears in the rent book, but you allow the man who frightens the tenant into paying it to get away with the loot, scot free."

"Yes, yes," he replied quickly, with a smile. "I never saw it in that light before. Now we both of us want to help the tenant. My view is that you cannot help anyone unless he will help himself."

"I am in agreement with you there, Sir," I replied, "but you must not forget that the people we are talking about are the most helpless in the community

‘ the least of my little ones,’ and they find themselves caught in a network of intricate laws they cannot understand.”

“ What I mean is,” he continued, “ that six months ought to be sufficient time for anyone to discover that he is paying more than he should. There must be some time limit. In the ordinary course of affairs there is a limitation of time for the recovery of debts. Suppose, for instance, that this war lasted twenty years . . . ”

“ Is that your opinion, may I ask? ” I interposed with alarm.

“ Nobody knows how long it will last,” he said, “ but in any case, we are not going to give way even should it take that length of time. But supposing it did last twenty years, we should find ourselves in an impossible situation, if people suddenly woke up then and said they had been paying five shillings a week too much all that time, and they all claimed back from £200 to £300. In order to get the Bill through before the House rises, I would propose a compromise that the six months limit be accepted, and that within the first six months after the passing of the Act the tenants can claim all the back excess they have paid. If you can get the consent of your supporters in the Commons to this, I will recommend it to the House of Lords, and if necessary I will move its acceptance myself.”

I thought this a very reasonable compromise, and so did all the Members who were interested in the matter, and on June 29th, 1917, this was sanctioned by the House of Commons. Upon this occasion Mr. Ramsay Macdonald made his only contribution to any of these early Rent Act debates. His interven-

tion was valuable, as he made it quite clear that the tenant could recover these overpaid amounts by deducting them from his rent in order to avoid the undesirable necessity of suing his landlord.

On July 10th, 1917, these new clauses obtained the Royal Assent, and thus ended one injustice, which however, was only to be succeeded by a host of others.

CHAPTER XV

THE RUNAWAYS

WITH the passing of the new Act we had to seek other quarters. Fortunately another friend came to the rescue and lent me a room at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Mr. Grant Richards also consented to publish a popular guide to the Rent Act under the title of "Rent Raising Made Illegal," if I could find a printer. This was not an easy matter at that time, but I eventually enlisted the services of Mr. H. Gilham, under whose supervision a most creditable and useful booklet was produced.

At last with an office, legal advisers and literature, we felt we could commence enrolling members who would be willing to assist in their respective localities, and we obtained the names of several thousands, the majority of whom were too hard pressed by the war to render any other help than that of supplying us with facts, upon which we could base our appeal to Parliament for an amended Act.

New circumstances were continually bringing forward new problems, and we were constantly adapting our methods to meet them. The air raids caused a complete upheaval in and around London. But very few homes were destroyed or people rendered homeless in those districts where air raids took place. It was the districts which were immune from air raids that suffered most from them. The poor people were compelled to continue to reside in the districts

that were being continually bombed, but those with means took to their heels and fled to safer places. Finding no house to let they dangled their wealth before the house agent's eyes, and he soon found a way of relieving them of it.

He started by letting houses over the tenants' heads to these runaways, serving notices to quit upon the tenants, and then informing them that they were to pay their rent in future to their new landlords. After a few weeks the new landlord gave notice to quit, and served a summons and applied to the Court for possession for his own occupation. The tenant found himself estopped by the Court from disputing his landlord's title, as he had paid rent to him, and an order was always made for the tenant's ejectment. Several cases of this nature we fought, and received no help at all from the Courts. At last I circularised all the tenants and associations in the districts where this was taking place, advising that whenever this trick was attempted the tenant should refuse to pay rent to the new man, and wait for a summons. He would then see who his landlord really was, as the new tenant who claimed to be his landlord could not sue, having taken no rent from the occupier of the house. Our persistent agitation killed this trick for a time, but even to-day cases crop up where it is being worked by the unscrupulous.

Finding they were defeated in this, the agents discovered that nothing prevented them from selling the house over the tenant's head, and thus substituting a new landlord who could get possession. In this way hundreds of families in and around London, and up the Thames Valley, were rendered homeless to save the skins of those with means, who merely wanted

to vacate their own homes temporarily whilst the air raids were in progress.

Fear robbed these people of all thought for others, and the house agents encouraged them to buy, by refusing to let any house that became vacant.

A casual conversation upon an Ealing tramcar started me upon a new line of investigation. A little hen-pecked looking man kept jumping up from his seat, and rushing to my side of the car, and craning his neck over the rail until I was constrained to ask him if he had lost anything.

"I'm looking for something," said he. "I want a house."

"I am afraid that 'want will be your master,'" I replied. "Have you not noticed that all the bills in the house agents' windows say, 'No houses to let'?"

"If I can't rent one, I shall have to buy one, I suppose," he grunted. "I can't go home to-night without something being settled," he added, sitting down at my side and becoming confidential. "You know, my life won't be worth living if I don't get a house to-day. Last night I had a fearful time with my wife. She nearly went out of her mind. I absolutely couldn't do anything with her. It was positively absurd, as there was really nothing to fear. It was only the firing of our own anti-aircraft guns, but she fairly lost her head, and would not listen to reason. I had a terrible night of it."

"I am afraid you will have some difficulty in finding a vacant house in this district," I said, "as there are so many munition works around here, and every house is full up."

"I can't help it," said he, trembling at the thought

of returning home. "I shall have to buy anything that's going, occupied or unoccupied. You don't know my wife," he added dejectedly.

"Why don't you take her away for a holiday, say to Devonshire?" I suggested. "That will be out of the way of the raids and may come cheaper."

"What is to become of me, then? I can't live in my house alone. I have my business to attend to, and must get some place within reach of it," he replied. "There's nothing for it, I shall have to find something about here."

"You don't mean to say that you would attempt to turn out a family for yourself and wife, when there is no other house for them to go into, do you?"

"As I say, you don't know my wife," he repeated emphatically. "Of course, I should turn them out if they wouldn't go, wouldn't you?"

"Why should I?" I asked with a smile. "But then, I forgot, I don't happen to have the pleasure of knowing your wife. That alters matters. I say, friend, she seems to have put the wind up you all right. When your nerves are steadier I hope you will take a calmer view of things."

"But supposing you buy a house with a tenant in it, you will offer her your present house, will you not?" I added as an after-thought.

"Certainly not, I want to live there again after the war is over," he snarled.

"But the tenant of the house you buy might be a soldier's wife, and might also want the house she now occupies after the war. It seems only fair to exchange, if she, like her husband, does not mind the sound of gun-fire."

"I am not concerned about anybody but myself," said he testily. "She will have to look after herself as I am doing."

"Don't forget your wife," I added, "and at the same time you might throw in a thought for the soldier who is looking after you both, and his wife who is looking after their home."

At the next stopping place, I got off the car and wandered into an agent's office. I told a most pitiful story about the effects of the raids upon my wife's nerves, and implored him to let me have a house anywhere, and at any price.

To my amazement, the agent replied, "How much money have you got?"

"Money? I don't understand you! I can pay the rent if that is what you want to know."

"Have you £100?" said the agent, ignoring my remark.

"No. Why?" I asked, wondering what the game could be.

"Well, have you got £50? or £25? or £10?" and to each of these questions, I shook my head and repeated my query, "Why?"

"Look here, then," said he, "Surely you can raise a fiver? All you have to do is to hand me over a fiver, and sign this paper, and I will sell you a house. This is the only way you can get one, and this is dirt cheap."

"Half a minute," I retorted. "I don't want a dirty house cheap. But this interests me, and we might do business. Are you serious about only wanting £5 down, and then the house is mine? How do you do it?"

"It is very simple. This is an agreement to

purchase, and the £5 is a deposit. Then you will have only to pay some small fees, and the Building Society, in which I have an interest, will arrange for payments of about £4 a month for a number of years, until the purchase price is paid off."

"Where is the house you are offering me? Surely I can see it first. You don't know my wife. I have to consider her. Is the house ready for me to go into this week?"

"You can't get into it for a few weeks, as there are still tenants in it, but that will not matter; they have had notice to get out, and we can soon clear them out of it. You need not worry about that," he said confidently.

"I thought there was some kind of Act of Parliament preventing tenants from being disturbed," said I innocently.

"We don't take any notice of that," he replied. "All you have to do is to sign this paper, and pay so much a month, and when we have made the house over to you, you will get the tenants out in no time."

"That seems good enough," I agreed. "I didn't think it was so easy. Therefore, if I pay you monthly instalments instead of paying the same amount as rent, I can turn anybody out, as I am then the landlord."

"Yes, that's it. It is quite simple," he assured me. "The Judges fall to it every time, but it isn't often we have to go to Court, as we soon frighten them out."

I secured the addresses of three houses upon the plea that I must first report upon them to my wife, but I was warned about viewing them, as the tenants might not let me in, and I might get a warm recep-

tion. I said I would chance that. In fact, I could not have had a warmer reception than I did receive after I had told these tenants what was going on, and requested them to communicate with me at once should any attempt be made to bother them.

In this way I went from agent to agent around London, learning from each their own special tricks, and by obtaining the addresses of the next victims whose homes they were attacking, I was able to instruct them how to defend themselves. I purposely kept my portrait from being published in the papers, so that I should not be recognised upon my expeditions. *The Daily Sketch* found an early one somewhere, but as I could never remember ever being so good looking that did no harm.

One day as I was about to enter an agent's office to buy a house, I noticed a small card in the window saying that an intelligent clerk was required. I waited whilst the agent was telling an old lady how she could rid the house of tenants if she bought one, and then a roguish fancy made me apply for the job. I think my first remark to him as his client was leaving the shop predisposed me in his favour.

"These blessed tenants are worse than vermin," said I. "It's a terrible job to get rid of them when once they get into a house."

"You are quite right," he replied. "That's the right point of view. Some people are getting too beastly sentimental about these pests of late. I don't hold with pampering them."

Needless to say as soon as I asked if I was suitable for the job, he was so pleased with me that he forgot to ask for a reference. I spent a very pleasant and instructive fortnight with him, and he imagines that

I was called up and died fighting to protect the homes of England. He little knew that he had engaged a home protector unawares, but scores of his tenants would have told him so, within a few months, if they had known that that was how they came to hear of me.

I journeyed up and down the Thames Valley and found that a brisk trade was being done there in selling houses that were tenanted and in turning out the occupiers and breaking up soldiers' homes. In Reading several thousands of houses changed owners, and Colonel Leslie Wilson, the Member of Parliament at that time, sent a contribution to the War Rents League to assist us to defend his poor constituents.

Brighton was another place that suffered from this influx of runaways from air raids. A firm of speculators, purporting to finance the purchase of houses, bought up streets of working class properties there, and send out canvassers in districts visited by air raids to induce the terrified to purchase them. These speculators, thinking I was willing to sell myself and those who trusted me, and fancying that I might place a large amount of business in their way, made me the tempting offer of £1,000 a year if I would allow my name to be included among their directors. When I could recover my breath, I asked them what was wrong with the concern. Naturally, I turned the offer down, but not until I had obtained from them the list of houses they had bought, and I was in this way able to do something to prevent the tenants of them being disturbed. A year or so afterwards, this affair was proved to be a swindle, and the directors became the guests of His Majesty for a time.

The mass of evidence gathered and personally investigated by me upon my travels was irrefutable. I quietly organised a campaign instructing every victim to write to the Lord Chancellor and to other Ministers, giving them the exact details of what was taking place. And in cases where the sufferer was a soldier's wife, or a war widow with children, I arranged that letters should be written to Mrs. Lloyd George, who was interested in child welfare, so that she might receive one letter at least every morning before breakfast, upon the chance that a letter a day might keep the bailiff away.

This was carried out so unpretentiously that everybody expressed surprise, when, without warning, the Lord Chancellor introduced a Bill into the House of Lords in March, 1918, to put a stop to possession being granted to new purchasers. The letters to the Home Office, the Local Government Board, the Admiralty, and the Scottish Office had had effect, as each of these departments investigated the statements made to them, and supplied the Lord Chancellor with evidence of the extensive hardship being caused, although the Bill was doubtless the outcome of the Lord Chancellor's own investigations in the Thames Valley, as he said his notice had been called to the grievance by a letter from Buckinghamshire, which was possibly one of mine.

The reputable property owners and agents were amazed at what was going on. Mr. Edwin Evans, Mr. A. W. Shelton, and the Secretary of the Surveyors' Institute asked me to meet them and discuss the new measure, and when I placed before them the evidence I had accumulated, like straight and honourable men they agreed to support the Bill.

I was particularly interested in the debates in the House of Lords, and I was impressed so much by the quiet sincerity of the late Earl of Camperdown in his desire to make the measure retrospective in order to save the homes of the wives and widows of soldiers, that I sent him a statement of those cases that had come to my notice, and in reply I received a charming letter of thanks assuring me that he would do his utmost to assist. In Committee, his Lordship made an effective speech in which he was supported by Earl Russell, and so great was his anxiety during the progress of the debate that the strength of his case should be appreciated, that I noticed him becoming restless, and finally resolving to make a last effort, I saw him approach the Lord Chancellor and unroll the statement I had sent him and discuss it in whispers. The sitting ended by the Lord Chancellor promising to consider the insertion of an earlier date from which the Bill should take effect.

This was brought about by the Government adopting an amendment proposed by Sir Herbert Nield, declaring that no purchaser of a house after September 30th, 1917, was entitled to apply for possession and turn the tenant out. I cannot express my thanks too much for the interest and kindness shown by Sir Herbert Nield in connection with this measure. His own district of Ealing was seriously affected by these runaways, and the date he selected was the first date when the systematic nightly raids began. All the arguments he then used so well against turning tenants into the street apply equally to-day, and it is bewildering to find politicians who advocate peace at home when there is war abroad, permitting war at home when peace abroad has been declared.

There is another incident that should be mentioned in connection with this measure. On the morning of March 20th, 1918, I received a letter with a newspaper report from Mr. Humms, who was energetically watching the interests of our soldiers at Letchworth, giving an account of the expected eviction next day of two men who had fought at Mons, and been wounded and honourably discharged from the Army. They were among the earliest to volunteer for the front, and no sooner had they returned home to Hitchin, than their cottages had been bought by a private Electric Light Company, who had obtained an order for their ejection. The case caused some feeling in the district as the Magistrates had their own opinions about the rights of property, and an appeal to them to suspend the order until other accommodation could be found seemed hopeless.

I made up my mind to save the homes of these men if it were at all possible. Wondering what to do, I went to the House of Lords to hear the debate upon the Amendment Bill. Suddenly, I noticed Earl Russell enter and take his seat, and remembering his speech of the day before on behalf of soldiers, and recollecting that he was interested in electricity, I wrote a note, which was handed to him by the attendant, asking him to see me for a minute or two in the Lobby. Before long he had all the facts in his possession, and had promised to give publicity to this case in his speech upon the Bill later in the afternoon. His speech made a profound impression upon their Lordships. Even the most uninterested began to take notice when he said :

“ Among the various recruiting inducements

which incited them to enrol, your Lordships may possibly recollect, was a poster showing a cottage home in England with the words underneath, 'Is this worth fighting for?' I think your Lordships will appreciate the rather grave irony of these words to these men, when they come back discharged from the Front and find that, although the home may have been worth fighting for, they are no longer to have it, for it has been bought over their heads, and that they are to be turned out."

The Lord Chancellor expressed himself strongly in sympathy with Earl Russell's case, and asked him to send particulars of it at once to the Home Office, which was done the same night.

Earl Russell's intervention saved the homes of these men, for at the next meeting of the Petty Bench, the Magistrates had experienced some of the profound impression that had been made upon the House of Lords, and they refused to release their bailiffs to help the Electric Light Company turn out the Mons Heroes.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE TROUBLE

WHILST the Amending Act was being carried, as described in the last chapter, other causes were breeding trouble, and other methods were being employed to displace householders.

Unsuspecting women were being led by cunning agents and collectors to get into arrears with their rent, so that orders might be obtained for their ejectment. Not that these orders were wanted to secure the payment of arrears, but solely as a preliminary step to turn out the tenant.

This is an instance in which we were successful in defeating such an attempt.

A woman, whose husband was serving abroad, came to me in great distress, as she had to appear at the Court next day, when a warrant for ejectment was being applied for under the Courts Emergency Powers Act. Some months previously an order had been made against her and suspended as long as she paid £1 a week, which included the current rent and an instalment of the arrears. The arrears had been caused through the house changing hands, and the new owners refusing to accept the rent. These people were a new firm of speculators who were willing to forego the rent, as they wanted the empty house for sale again. Some months elapsed, when suddenly a summons was issued against the tenant for possession and a large amount of rent due. The woman was not aware that she should have paid the rent into Court with a plea of tender, and as

“mesne profits” were asked up to the day of hearing, she would have been unable to raise sufficient to pay the whole amount within the time allowed. She appeared alone before the Judge and admitted the debt; the order was made automatically, and in addition she was ordered to pay £8 for costs. She had been tricked by the landlord, and now she was fined by the Court for allowing herself to be tricked by him.

After careful inquiry I found that the woman did not really owe anything upon the rent and the instalments, for immediately after the Judge had made his order, the landlord had instructed the Rating Authority that he would not pay the rates and that they were to collect them from the tenant in future. She had therefore been paying £1 a week off the rates instead of paying it as rent.

The next morning we appeared in Court, and the speculator made a great song about the tenant not obeying the Judge’s order, but as soon as the Judge saw the trick, he refused to grant a warrant, and ordered the rent to be paid in future into Court, after the rates had been met.

Two months went by, and the woman returned to me again. There was another application to the Court for ejectment on the ground that she had not obeyed the Judge’s order to pay the money into Court. This time we were able to prove that after the last hearing, the landlord had gone to the woman and told her he would call every Monday morning for the rent, which would save her the trouble of having to take it to the Court, which was two miles away. Unsuspectingly, she paid him, but instead of entering it in her book as the current rent, he ante-

dated it as payment for months back. With some difficulty we proved this to the Judge, and he, being convinced that the landlord had taken it upon himself to set aside the order to pay the rent into Court, refused to help him.

If the woman had not had legal assistance, she would have been turned out, without a doubt. As it was, the Judge tried to settle the case by urging the woman to accept the speculator's offer to forgive her the rent owing and the costs, if she would vacate the house in a month. The Judge was unlucky this time in describing the landlord's offer as generous, for we had the weight of evidence on our side—the tenant having thirteen children.

She told a graphic story of her attempts to obtain another house or rooms. At first, she started out by telling the whole truth about the number of her family, but as soon as agents and landlords heard there was such an unlucky number of them, they refused to entertain her applications. She then reduced the number of children by one every time she went after a house. And she assured the Judge that when she had got even as low as three, she still met with refusals everywhere.

"What would you have done with the other children," asked the Judge, now thoroughly interested, "supposing the rooms had been let to you upon your statement that you had only three in family?"

"I should have smuggled them in," replied the woman, in a matter of fact way, as though this was the only possible answer to the conundrum.

With a smile in his eyes, the Judge, who was evidently touched with the courage of this struggler,

nodded his head, and said under his breath, "Some smuggler."

The County Court Judge was usually willing to assist in preventing injustice, after he had been convinced, which was no easy task, that the landlord was taking an unfair advantage of a poor tenant.

The Petty Justices and Magistrates in the Police Courts, however, seemed to resent any restriction by the Rent Act being placed upon their powers to summarily order tenants out, and to send the police to eject them. The constitution of the Bench may have largely accounted for this attitude, but all over the country during the last nine years their judgments have been noted for lack of consideration to poor tenants, and it is only the poorest of the poor that are brought before them, as they are all tenants under a rental of £20 a year.

Here is an instance of the way in which one of these Petty Benches of Magistrates carried out its duties. In August, 1917, a workman asked my assistance to recover £10 paid in excess of his standard rent. As he sub-let half the house to another workman, I consented to help him on condition that he shared the amount recovered with his sub-tenant. The money was refunded, the rent adjusted, and the lodger fairly treated.

Some time went by, and the tenant-landlord, finding that other workers wanted rooms and were willing to pay any rent if they could get them, without consideration for those whom they displaced, began to demand a higher rent from his lodger. The usual forms of intimidation were resorted to, culminating in notice of application to the magistrates for ejectment.

The lodger attended the Court upon the day specified upon his notice, and he was told that as the landlord had not put in an appearance he could go home and need not worry.

Upon reaching home from work a fortnight later, he found his family and furniture in the street, and his rooms let to another man. He immediately consulted the Court missionary, who discovered that the landlord had made his application in the lodger's absence, the day before the lodger had been summoned to attend the Court, and the worthy Justices of the Peace, in their hurried hour of dispensing justice before lunch, had, as in pre-war days, automatically said "Fourteen days" without a thought.

The missionary and a constable reinstated the lodger that night. More notices to quit and another application followed, and upon this occasion, the man was sent to me by the missionary, and our solicitor defeated the landlord's manœuvre.

Another month passed, and the landlord started again. The lodger feeling certain he would get justice this time after all his persecution, appeared by himself.

His landlord handed to the Bench a letter from his daughter stating she wanted to come and live with him to look after him, and when the lodger said this was untrue, as the rooms had already been promised to another man, and that this was the third time he had been brought to that Court, the magistrates retorted that it was about time he was out, as he had had a good run, and once more they uttered their familiar refrain, "Fourteen days."

Back he came to me, and I went with him to the Court, where we discovered the letter. It was

unsigned and gave no address. An application was at once entered for a new trial, and after some difficulty the magistrates were prevailed upon to postpone the case and to order the daughter to attend to give evidence.

At the adjourned hearing the Clerk of the Court announced he had received a letter from the daughter saying she had written the letter at her father's dictation in order to deceive his lodger, that she had never had any intention of living with her father, and she hoped the Court would not punish her for what she had done.

The order for ejectment was set aside, but costs were refused, although the lodger had been brought to the Court five times, and lost five days' work in consequence.

Another form of selfishness was apparent in the attempts made to turn out our soldiers' families and distressed citizens whose houses had been purchased over their heads by those who had benefitted financially through the war.

A young man for some years had maintained his mother and sister by his work in one of the Government workshops. When war broke out he volunteered for service, and his application was not accepted. But after an urgent appeal by the War Office for engineers for the front, he was released from his employ with regret, and was promised that his post would be given back to him after the war. He was drafted to Palestine, whilst his widowed mother, a kindly old lady, did her bit to keep his home together and to help her country by providing a comfortable home for three munition girls who worked in the danger zone.

In the same workshop was another man of similar age in a much less responsible position. He did not volunteer, but secured a safe job, and by means of war bonuses and much overtime he saved money and married a wife. He tenanted a flat of three rooms near by, and as his prosperity increased so his ideas expanded, until one day he blossomed forth into a property owner by purchasing the house in which his colleague's mother and sister dwelt.

Then he started to worry the good lady. She sought my advice, and fearing for her, as at that time she had no protection under the Rent Act, I approached the Billeting Board with a request to commandeer the house and billet in it the munition workers who were living there. I pointed out to this department the difficulty of getting suitable places for the young girls who were working at munitions, and that, if this widow were ejected, three workers would be turned out as well. The Board were uncertain of their powers, in fact they could not understand the terms of the Act under which they were constituted. I tried my best to induce them to chance it, and I told them that if I were in their place I would commandeer the house at once. To which they replied, "Then you would not be here long."

"At all events," said I, "I should have done something of use whilst I was here, instead of sitting still for fear of misreading the law, which was passed to meet such emergencies."

Finding red tape too strong for me here, I went at once to the Ministry of Munitions, whose high explosives had before blown away all barriers to getting things done, and I was fortunate to discover

that Mr. A. McCallum Scott (M.P. for Bridgeton) was acting as private secretary to the Minister. I asked this time for the district to be scheduled as a munition area, so that no munition worker could be disturbed. Mr. McCallum Scott at once entered into the importance of protecting his workers, and referred me without delay to the department that would assist me. An inspector was sent to make inquiries into the housing of munition workers, and also to investigate the case in which I was interested. He frightened the tenant by telling her she could be thrown out of her house, and he encouraged the new purchaser by telling him that he would have no difficulty in obtaining possession. The landlord became so emboldened by the words of the Government official that he issued a summons forthwith.

I reported this to the Ministry, and the inspector was suspended and a new inquiry instituted. Before the Ministry could schedule the district, the day for the trial came round, and much to my regret I was unable to be present. I went with the widow to a solicitor and gave him all the possible points upon which he could fight, specially asking that he should emphasise the fact that the Government had guaranteed the son's job on his return, and that all we asked was that the Court should guarantee his home. It was however with much misgiving that I left his office.

The day after the hearing, the old lady called upon me. "Well, Mr. Rider," she said, "I am sure you will not be disappointed at the result. You know you said that you did not expect that we should succeed?"

"I am sorry," I hastily replied, "I thought there might have been a chance, especially before Judge Granger, who is the kindest and most merciful Judge we have. If he could not see his way to save your son's home, it shows that the law is pretty bad."

"But I won, I won," she interrupted, hardly able to get the words out quickly enough. "The solicitor read your letter to the Ministry of Munitions, and told the Judge all the circumstances, and then the Judge said 'We are all more or less inconvenienced by this war, and these cases are most difficult to decide, but in this instance the balance is decidedly in favour of the tenant, and therefore I dismiss the application.'"

I could see that the strain and worry had told upon the soldier's mother, and I tried to cheer her up with the news that she would not be bothered again. But the anxiety of the proceedings had been too great for her; a few days afterwards the doctor ordered her into the country to rest, and within a month she died.

A week after the funeral the new landlord wrote to the daughter, saying that now her mother was dead he refused to recognise her as his tenant, that he meant now to have his house, and if she did not get out at once he would throw her into the street.

The summons was duly issued, and being disengaged Mr. Schultess-Young threw himself enthusiastically into the case on the daughter's behalf. I accompanied her to Somerset House and assisted her to take out letters of administration. We had only a few days before the case was to be heard, and every official to whom we explained the matter

and the need for hastening the usual procedure, became eager to do his best to help us in saving the soldier's home. There seemed to be less red tape at Somerset House than elsewhere, or it may have been that it lost its power in the presence of a handsome young woman. In any case, we obtained the necessary documents in record time.

At the hearing of the summons, the soldier's former workmate made his claim in the witness box, and strongly emphasised the fact that he had not sufficient accommodation where he lived, as his son had to sleep in the same room as his wife and himself, which he repeatedly informed the Court was positively indecent.

His cross-examination opened very quietly, bringing out the facts of the application against the widow. Suddenly the counsel shot at him the question, "How old is your son?"

The landlord hesitated.

"How old is your son?" fired the counsel again. Still no reply.

"How old is your son?" roared the Judge like one of His Majesty's big guns.

"Eighteen months," came the feeble reply, and then the whole Court rocked with laughter. It was such a surprise to the policeman at the door that he nearly had a fit, and had to pop outside to get over it.

Needless to relate, the Judge dismissed the case and allowed substantial costs.

For several years after, whenever I visited that Court, the policeman at the door would recognise me and whisper in my ear, "How old's the son?" and then renew his chuckle.

A surprise awaited me one morning upon entering my office. My friend came to me with a letter he had received from his landlord objecting to my presence and that of the War Rents League upon his premises, and threatening that unless I vacated them at once he would have to give my friend notice to quit. The surprise to me was not in having to move on, as I had had a former experience, but in the discovery that the landlord was a Member of Parliament, who had not looked kindly upon the Rent Act, and I have no doubt he was as surprised to find me upon his premises as I was to find that he was the owner of them.

There was only one thing to be done, and that was to leave the place at once. I wrote him a polite letter informing him that this was my intention, and I received an equally polite acknowledgment in return.

To leave at a moment's notice was most inconvenient, as I knew of no other office available, and until I could fix up a new address I could not notify tenants where to find me, nor could I stop them from calling at the forbidden house.

Again did Providence come to our assistance. Almost opposite my office had been erected one of the most beautiful memorials in London, and this had been thoughtfully provided with a most comfortable seat for the weary, the heavy laden and the sore distressed.

So I made arrangements with the caretaker of the offices to send all inquirers for me across to this seat, and there, morning after morning until a new office could be found, I interviewed them beneath the joyous figure of Margaret Macdonald at play

with nine happy youngsters, who smiled down upon us and blessed our work on behalf of mothers and children.

CHAPTER XVII

LAST MINUTE CASES

To find a new office was not an easy matter. As soon as landlords and estate agents learned my name and the nature of my activities they smilingly shook their heads, and murmured, "Nothing doing." All my attempts to induce wealthy Trade Unions to allow me the use of one of their unoccupied rooms for interviews a few hours a day were without avail. At last I thought of an old friend, Fred Verinder, the Secretary of the League for the Taxation of Land Values, and his recommendation secured me a room in the Adelphi.

Some interesting adventures occurred whilst I was here during 1918.

The six months' limit for the recovery of illegal overcharges of rent came to an end early in the January. For some months I had had correspondence with a number of tenants, who had paid in excess of their legal rents, and who had tried by exchange of letters to arrange matters amicably with their landlord. He had taken up a high and mighty attitude at first, but as time went on he had climbed down, and suggested that he should make an appointment with me to adjust differences, if his tenants would consent, and to this they willingly agreed. He made many appointments and at the last moment sent telegrams of apology, but at last he came and brought his books. For an hour or so, we went carefully through the accounts and finally settled the rents for the fifteen tenants concerned.

As he was leaving he proposed that I should join

him in a friendly cup of coffee. The refreshment enabled us to talk with greater freedom, and I asked him why he had written such silly letters to his tenants, and had not come to see me before, as he could have saved himself and his tenants a lot of trouble.

He smiled an enigmatic smile, and asked me if I remembered what new regulations came into force that day. I shook my head.

"Well," said he, "to-day is the first day after the expiry of the six months' limit for the recovery of excess rent paid during the past two years. From to-day tenants can only recover excess rent paid during the last six months."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "that is the reason why you would not keep your former appointments, was it? But you could not have tricked these tenants out of their rights, as they had already recovered the excess by deducting it from their rent."

"I am not concerned about them," he replied. "I have five hundred flats, and if I had settled with these fifteen before to-day I should have had the whole lot of my tenants down upon me. I don't mind paying back £10 to each of these, but I did object to paying back £5,000 to the lot. I don't think I have done so badly out of it during the last two years, do you? If I had not kept up a good bluff, or had given way a moment earlier, I should have lost my little war bonus. Tenants! Ugh! They are a lot of sanguinary sheep! These fifteen are the only men among them."

Lord Rhondda's words flashed through my mind, "You can't help anyone unless he will help himself." Eventually I discovered that the 485 tenants

who had been done, would not join with the fighting fifteen, but were waiting sulking in their tents to see how the others got on, so that without any trouble or anxiety to themselves they could roll in and secure the results of the victory. In this they were disappointed, as the battle resulted in the rout of these 485 profiteers by their cunning fox of a landlord, and it jolly well served them right.

One morning an old workman, poor and pathetic, from the East End, came in with many apologies to see if there was any way out of the blind alley into which circumstances had driven him. He had lived with his wife for fifteen years at the top of a tenement house of three floors, each floor being let out to a family. The ground floor of this house had recently been taken by a new tenant, whose wife was a great patron of the local "boozer" at the top of the street. The agent and caretaker of these tenements lived next door, and his wife and her social next-door neighbour made overtures to the workman's wife to join with them in their visits to the pub at the corner. Her refusal to drink with them so offended their "amour propre," that they decided she was not fit to live in the same street with them, and they put their heads together to concoct some excuse for turning her out.

The conspiracy bore fruit, as the agent took the man to the Police Court, and asked that he should be ejected because his wife would shut the front door when the woman downstairs wanted it open until late in the evening, so that her children could run in and out as they liked without knocking and disturbing her.

The Magistrate promptly prescribed his tradi-

tional cure for all tenancy complaints, namely "Three weeks."

The three weeks expired on the morrow, and the agent, prodded on by his wife, threatened to turn this elderly couple into the gutter next day. What were they to do? He had worn himself out looking for another place, and he could not face going into the workhouse and being separated from his wife after all their years together. In hopeless despair he laid his head upon my table and wept, and between his sobs he told me his wife's nerves were broken down; that she had had no sleep for nights, as the thought of being evicted was a nightmare to her.

I patted the old fellow on the back, and told him to cheer up. I surprised him by saying that his wife's illness was the best news he had told me, as that might save them both. I found she had been attended by a large-hearted doctor near by, so I advised him to call in the doctor at once, and to tell him all the circumstances. I had no doubt the doctor would know what to do, and that his medicine would be an antidote to that dispensed by the Magistrate. Early the next morning he must go to the Police Court with the Doctor if possible, and in order to hold the situation he must apply for an extension of time on account of the state of his wife's health. I assured him he would not be turned out, and I consoled him by telling him stories of homes that had been saved at the last moment. He dried his eyes and went away a little wiser and much happier.

Not hearing from him, my daily toll of troubles drove all thoughts of the little man out of my mind, until about a month after when he called upon me again.

I was eager to know what had happened. My plan, it seemed, had worked as anticipated. The doctor went with him to the Court, and stated about his wife's illness, whereupon an order was made that no warrant should be granted until she was well enough to go out again. Now he had come to ask what was to be done to release his wife from their rooms, as she was much better, but she did not dare go out even to do necessary shopping, for fear of being turned out all together, for the two female dragons were watching at the front door.

I was highly amused at the situation. I had secured her in her home more firmly than I had expected. I had actually made his wife a prisoner, and I could not see any way in which she could be let out with safety.

I asked many questions about the agent and his treatment of other tenants, and I received such extraordinary accounts of his behaviour that I felt it wise not to credit them, until I had made some personal investigations. I told my little man to keep his wife indoors for another week, whilst I visited the locality and made inquiries. If what he told me was true, I would guarantee that his home would be safer than it had ever been.

For two days I roamed around this poor little neighbourhood asking questions about the agent, and interviewing several of his former tenants. I also compared notes with the Doctor and the Town Clerk, and found out the owners' names and addresses. I wrote to them asking whether they were aware of the doings of their agent, which were not reflecting credit upon the name of their firm, and I particularly asked that they should instruct him

to withdraw all proceedings against my little man, as I was certain they were entered upon without their knowledge. By return I received a reply suggesting that somebody had been pulling my leg, and stating that the agent was a most trusted and reliable servant of theirs who had been in their employ for thirty years. I answered this by supplying some of the details of the results of my inquiries and promising to give more if required.

Two days later, as I approached my office, I noticed a short, wizened, dilapidated person examining the names of the occupants of the building at the front door. He looked just like one of my poor downtrodden tenants, and finding that he was looking for me, I assumed he was one, and invited him upstairs. The staircase was lined with a dozen or more tenants, mostly women, awaiting my arrival. I opened the office door, and when all were seated, I said I would start with the one in the greatest hurry.

The wizened one jumped at the chance, and took the seat opposite to me at the table.

"Well, what is your trouble?" said I opening the ball.

"I've come to see you about this letter to my employers," said he, unfolding a letter of mine, which revealed at a glance that he must be the agent of the tenements.

"What do you mean by writing to them? That's what I want to know? I've come to demand an apology," he went on, gradually whipping himself up to the attack.

I calmly watched him losing his temper, and I noted with satisfaction that the tenants in waiting were becoming interested, as I felt that I should have

to enlist their support to overcome this irate old fellow.

"What's the matter with this letter?" said I with a smile. "Let us go through it quietly, line by line. Is it true that you had a tenant by the name of Dover, who had five children, and that you turned her out of her home?"

He admitted that it was true.

"When her husband was killed in France, you told her, did you not, that you would do her rooms up for her?"

"Yes, I did 'em up," he replied sullenly.

"And you also did her in, didn't you, you Beauty! Now, this is exactly what you did, and deny it if you can, and I will ask these ladies sitting here to say what they think of you. You professed sympathy for Mrs. Dover and her family, and you told her if she would empty the front room you would paper, paint and whitewash it. When the work was finished you nailed up the door saying that the room must have time to dry. Then you asked her to remove her things from the middle room into the back room, and trusting to your honesty she did so. When this room was finished, you nailed up that door as well, upon the same excuse. Having got all the furniture into the back room, you and your men came and pitched Mrs. Dover, her children and all her belongings, into the back garden. You turned this widow out by weekly instalments; and you re-let the rooms at double the rent. I wish I had known about you at the time, I would have made you sit up! What have you to say about all that? Can you deny it?"

"No," he stammered, "but she was an undesir-

able tenant. She was a loose character."

"Come! Come! Mr. Agent! She had lived there for ten years! Loose, indeed! Do I understand you only like the ladies in your houses who get 'tight?' I hear there are some among them who have experience in lifting their elbow."

The tenants were now enjoying the fun, and their laughter began to dismay the agent.

"Now let us take the next case," I went on. "You have another tenant named Mrs. Broadstairs. She asked you to attend to the sash cords of her windows, as she could not open them. After repeated requests, you went in one day with your workmen, and you took off all her doors and took out all her windows. What have you to say to that?"

"Well, she said she couldn't get any air in her rooms," he whimpered. "But I only took them away to repair them. I meant to put them back again, but I had an accident. I fell over a shutter and was laid up for weeks."

"Just so," I continued, knowing my facts were irrefutable. "You deprived this woman of doors and windows for a fortnight. One night her son arrived home on leave from the front, and he came round to your house and threatened to run you through with his bayonet, so mad was he at the brutal way in which you had treated his mother. And you even then refused to replace the windows and the doors."

"You see, he bullied me," he protested, "and I am not a man to be bullied, I can tell you," said he, squaring up his shoulders and looking threateningly. "I was in bed, and he even ran the bayonet into the bed clothes, so I told him to go

to the devil, as I would not put the windows back for him or anyone else."

"The next day the woman and her son went to the Court instead, and you had to pay damages, and were severely reprimanded by the Judge. Now do you think that my letter to your employer was justified? I consider that it was far too mild, as I have a long list of crimes against tenants that you have committed. What about Mrs. Margate and her eight children you are trying to frighten out because your wife has a pal who wants her rooms?"

"She is also an undesirable," he blurted out. "She leads a fast life."

"What a time you must have with all these ladies! Some fast, some loose, and others tight! You evidently see life down your way. You must really introduce me to them," I replied chaffingly, setting the room rocking with glee.

As he was by now reduced to a more contrite condition, I approached the subject of my little man.

"This is no laughing matter, Mr. Agent, whatever you may think about it," I led off, with a straight face. "I know enough about you, as you can see, to get you discharged from your job immediately. But I don't want to get you the sack, and if you will do as I tell you, I will give you another chance, and I will write to your employers and tell them that you are not the little ogre that you have imagined yourself to be. Write upon that piece of paper at once that you withdraw all proceedings against the tenant on the top floor and sign it. Give it to me. Now, that's settled. When you get home go straight up and see your tenant, whose wife is very ill, and who has no chance of getting out again

whilst the ejectment order is hanging over her head, and tell her that you are sorry she has been so unwell, and because of her illness you have quashed the proceedings. Then go down to the woman on the ground floor and tell her that as she is the latest comer in the house she will have to behave herself, and if you hear any more trouble about the front door she will have to look out for another place. Try to act towards these people as you would have them act towards you, and if you have any more differences with them, come and see me, and I will heal their grievances, and at the same time save your dignity, if you have any left."

The agent departed, thankful to get away from the hilarious circle of tenants surrounding him. I fully expected to hear that blue murder had been committed in the tenements, but a few years later, when I was in the district, I was rewarded to find that my little man was still living in his rooms, and that the agent had refrained from molesting his other tenants, although he tried to make them fear him by promising what he would do to them when the Rent Acts expired.

The publication of my new address in "The Star" brought me a rush of cases in which justice had miscarried, either through the poverty and ignorance of the tenants, the trickery of agents, or the hasty procedure of the Courts, or a combination of them all. These people would usually descend upon me at the last moment, hovering on the brink of disaster, and clutching at me as their only hope. As their need was the greatest, everything else was set aside, and it required all the ingenuity I could muster at such short notice to right their wrongs.

One of these last minute cases was that of a labourer, who lived in a well-known London slum area. The sanitary Authority suddenly came to the decision that the state of disrepair of the house in which he lived exceeded even the generous limit of dilapidations allowed for slums, and a notice to repair was served upon the owner or his agent. The next day the labourer received a notice to quit, which was followed up a week later with a summons. The agent attended the hearing and swore that the landlord reasonably required the house as a residence for himself, and the labourer was given a month to get out with his wife and family of four.

The warrant had been issued, and the bailiffs had been round to warn him that they were coming to put his things out the next day. Thank goodness, he had kept his summons and brought it with him!

I asked if he knew his landlord, and he said he had never seen him, although he had lived there all his life, and he did not even know his name until he saw it upon the summons. The agent was the little tin god in those parts, and they rarely ever saw him, as he sent his commands by his army of bullying rent collectors.

I bade him go home and be of good cheer, and to be sure not to let anybody into the house; he was also to tell his wife from me that I would save her home for her within a few hours.

My first glance at the summons filled me with joy. Never was there a greater contrast between landlord and tenant. The landlord resided in one of the many magnificent mansions that adorn London's northern heights.

Within an hour I was walking up his carriage drive, and was being ushered into his sunny morning room by a luxurious servant. A few minutes later, an elderly gentleman entered and made himself known to me as the landlord I wanted to meet.

"I am given to understand that you are thinking of leaving this house," I began pleasantly.

"Somebody must have misinformed you," said he, with a smile. "This is the first I have heard of it."

"I think you employ an agent named So-and-so?"

"Yes," said he, rather puzzled.

"Your agent, then, has sworn on oath to the County Court Judge, that you are leaving here in order to live in a four-roomed house in this street," said I, pointing to the address upon the summons which I handed to him for his inspection.

"I never interfere with my agent," he replied sharply, becoming annoyed, and handing the summons back. "He has full powers to act on my behalf, and I must decline to discuss his actions."

"You are bound by your agent's word, I believe," I continued, ignoring his displeasure, "and he has sworn that you want this slum dwelling to live in. The war has brought about such a wonderful feeling of fellowship between the classes and the masses that I thought you might be a philanthropist, who had decided to live among your tenants so as to get a personal insight into their conditions of life."

"I do not require any of your sarcasm, young man," said he with a withering air of dignity. "I wish you good morning," and with that he advanced towards the door.

"Of course, if you do decide to live in your slum," I went on, not noticing the snub, "I wish you would

allow your slum tenant to come here, as he is unable to find another place for his family. An exchange is only fair, and I think life here would enlighten him as much as life there would enlighten you."

By now he had rung the bell, and summoned his servant, to whom he gave orders to show me out.

I was enjoying every second and thinking furiously the while.

"Do you think it wise to refuse to discuss the matter with me?" I said quietly as I was stepping into the hall. "You are driving me to refer the matter to a solicitor, you know. I am here merely as a private person interested in this poor tenant, and I am determined that he shall not be rendered homeless. Orders obtained by misrepresentation! False statements made in your name! Perjury and goodness knows what else! How London will laugh when I tell the story with photos of both houses!"

This last shot did it. Taking my arm he led me back into the room, where we sat down and thrashed the matter out.

Half-an-hour later we parted upon the most friendly terms, I, with a document in my pocket, to the tenant, withdrawing the warrant and all proceedings, and he, with a determination to limit his agent's powers in the future.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PATRIOT

THE adventure of the northern heights was the first of many similar experiences. Attacking the lions in their dens, and making them feed out of my hand soon became an exhilarating pastime. Some lions were sly and showed vicious instincts, and then a judicious application of the Rent Restrictor was necessary to tame them, as the following instance shows.

A woman, the mother of five children, had notice from her landlord that her rent would be increased to sixteen shillings a week. She had lived in the house for many years, and in pre-war times paid eight shillings a week. No sooner had her husband been sent to France, than the landlord increased the rent to twelve shillings. I told her to refuse to pay the increase, to revert to the standard rent, and to recover all the excess she had paid.

The landlord wrote saying her rent was met by the Civil Liabilities, so that the amount she paid was no hardship upon her, as the Government was responsible for it, and he might as well have all he could get as anyone else. Unless she paid him sixteen shillings a week he would inform the Commissioners she was defrauding them, and he would get her allowance stopped and have her turned out.

This letter upset the household. Its effect upon the mother had been well calculated, and in fear and trembling she brought it to me without delay.

It was such a delightful piece of self-revelation, such an ingenuous "give-away," that I found some

difficulty in expressing our thanks to the writer of it. A polite letter was sent by the woman in reply, telling him to act according to his conscience, as she only desired what was right and just.

Before long, she had a notification from the Commissioners that her landlord had informed them her husband had made a false return of his rent at twelve shillings instead of eight shillings, and that her allowance would be reduced by £10 a year.

On the following day she received a summons from the landlord claiming possession of the house for his own occupation.

At once, I sought an interview with the Civil Liability Commissioner, the way being made easy by the willing assistance of a young lady in charge. I regret I did not learn her name, as she was far and away the most efficient female clerk I ever had business with in any Government department.

The Commissioner patiently heard my story and read the landlord's letter. He then produced the one the landlord had written to him. In this the landlord had gone to the other extreme. He wrote as a patriot, whose duty in a time of war was to save the Nation from being exploited, and he owed it to his conscience (suggested no doubt by our reply), painful though it was, to acquaint them with the fact that this tenant was deceiving them. He thought that such a gross case could only be met by the withdrawal of the allowance altogether.

We had a good laugh about the Patriot, and his obvious spite because he could not have his own way in the matter of rent, and it was arranged that the allowance should be adjusted from the next payment. I tried to impress the Commissioner with the

desirability of his department checking the amounts of rent paid out by them, in order that the State should not be at the mercy of such landlords, but to no purpose.

As the day for the hearing of the summons approached, I became anxious. I knew the usual attitude of the Judge in such cases, and I feared he might ignore the attempts to force the payment of illegal rent, and might try the issue solely on the ground of whether the man wanted to live in the house. If so, he would undoubtedly accept his uncorroborated statement.

We could discover no facts at all about him. All we knew was that he had left the district where the tenant lived and had gone a few miles further up the line. He might have been sheltering from the air raids in furnished rooms, for all we could tell, and he might put forward a piteous case that would give the Court sob-shock.

Three days before the hearing I determined to risk it, and to interview this lion in his den. I alighted from the train at a little country town that showed signs of having been disturbed from its age-long slumbers by the invasion of soldiers and munition workers, and I was soon directed to my destination.

Another mansion met my gaze. Self-contained, standing in its own grounds, with twelve rooms at least! What a find!

I was conducted into a large sitting room that extended the entire length of the house. In a few minutes, there entered a tall, handsome, jovial man with a light brown beard, dressed in tweeds with knee breeches, and carrying a hunting crop. Some lion, this, I thought!

Motioning me to a seat and offering his cigarette case, he exclaimed, "What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"I understand you are leaving here . . . , " I started, but before I could proceed, he gave a loud laugh, and said, "That's a great joke. I don't know anything about it."

"You are not leaving, then?" I stammered, with surprise.

"No, my dear fellow . . . Leaving? No! Most decidedly, No! I've a long lease of this place, and it's a cinch. Who the dickens has been telling you such a fairy tale?"

"I must have made a mistake," said I, altering my tactics, "and I must ask you to accept my apologies for disturbing you. I am looking about for a house to rent, as I have to come into this district shortly, and I quite understood from some one of whom I inquired that this house was going."

"Do you know who told you?" he asked, "as I can't imagine anybody thinking that I was leaving. Come and look here," he continued without waiting for a reply, beckoning me to the window at the other end of the room. "Look at the land I cultivate. There are so many acres of it. There's a fine lot of horses for you. Have you ever seen better? And what do you say to my cattle? I have so many head of them . . . Leave? I bet there are some people who would like to get hold of this place. Why, it's the best thing I've ever struck."

"I'm sorry," said I, "but I am a stranger about here, and it was my misunderstanding, of course. I do not want anything as large as this, but anything is better than nothing these days, and you can quite

understand that one has to be pretty lively to get anything at all. You have to get in before the place is advertised otherwise there is no chance. There is only my wife and myself, and a five or six roomed house would be quite large enough for us. You don't happen to know of one, do you?"

"I think I do, now you mention it," said he thoughtfully, "I've a little house going about the size you want. When do you want it by?"

"I am in no hurry for a month or six weeks," I replied. "I have really come up to-day to spy out the land to see what is possible to be done, and I should be thankful to you if you would give me the first refusal of the house you mention."

"It's some distance from here," he went on. "It is at Such-and-such-a-place."

"Where is that?" said I, cautiously leading him on, as the place named was where his tenant lived.

"It is only a few stations up the line, within easy access of here. It wouldn't take you long," he replied, evidently anxious to press the house upon me.

"That will suit me splendidly, I think. What is the rent, may I ask?"

"Sixteen shillings a week," said he, without hesitation. That amount had a familiar ring in my ears. I could have hugged him.

"You might write the address down," said I, offering him a paper and my pen, and trying to keep cool and unconcerned.

His conscience gave him no qualms now; he did as he was asked, and as he wrote I read the address of the home I had come to save.

"You might put the amount of rent beside it,

so that I shall not forget." And the lion obeyed me like a lamb.

"By the way," I added, "You have not given me your name and address. Just write it below, so that I shall know where to write." And he was as good as gold, even purring over it.

As I tucked this confession into my pocket, I casually remarked, "I will give a look at the house, and let you know in a few days whether it suits. Of course, you will not offer it to anyone before you hear from me?"

"That's all right," he replied cheerfully. But suddenly he became thoughtful. "Oblige me by not calling at the house," he added. "I should not like to disturb the tenant, as I have not finally settled with her. I shall know better where I stand by the end of the week."

"Have no fear about that, my dear sir," I rejoined. "You can trust me. I am the last person in the world who would disturb a tenant."

Then we parted the best of pals. All the way home I brooded over our conversation. There was some mystery somewhere. He seemed a very decent fellow, and yet, what had made him act in this way? At one moment I was inclined to let him know that I knew all, but finally I decided he ought to be taught his lesson.

So, three days after, we met again in the Court, and until the case was decided I had to make myself scarce, and hide my head in the counsel's gown for fear he should recognise me and run away.

The landlord went into the witness box, and took the oath, and kissed the book and swore by all that was holy that it was absolutely necessary he should

have possession of his little house, as he had nowhere to live, only temporarily residing with friends at the address upon the summons.

Mr. Schultess Young then took a hand in the game. He questioned him upon the increases of rent and the attempt to stop the Civil Liabilities. When his letter to the tenant was read to him, the crowded court lost control of itself and loudly hissed. Then he was asked about the grand house that he had upon a lease, and he parried the question by saying he had power to sub-let it. "But you have not sub-let it?" queried the counsel, to which there was no reply. He tried to dodge the questions about the horses and the cattle, and lost ground at every encounter.

"Now," said Mr. Young, handing to him the piece of paper he had given to me. "Is that your handwriting? I did not ask you to read it. I only want to know whether you wrote it."

The landlord was too dumbfounded to reply.

"Is it not a fact that a gentleman called upon you only three days ago?" continued the counsel. "And that you offered him this very house you say you cannot live without, at sixteen shillings a week, and wrote it down upon that paper signing your name to it?"

The lion had lost his tongue. The net was tight around him. I felt sorry that he should have placed himself in such a plight.

Calmly and quietly, the Judge, the only person in Court who exhibited no sign of emotion, held out his hand and asked for the paper to be given to him.

Turning to the landlord, in the same quiet manner,

he asked, "Did you write this?" and the landlord lowered his head and in a whisper acknowledged that he did.

"And you admit all the learned counsel has said?" continued the Judge. "Then all I can say is, that this is the most scandalous case that has ever been before me. You have no grounds whatever for asking the assistance of this Court to gain possession of your house. You have tried to deceive the Court with statements you know to be untrue. This is a serious offence, but I shall dismiss this case with costs, and shall give instructions that the costs be assessed upon the highest scale possible in order to show my detestation of your conduct."

Eighteen months afterwards, a lady called upon me with a letter recommending her to apply to me for assistance. I was amazed to find that it was written by this very landlord. I said I knew this man, but I could not understand him sending anyone to me as I had punished him severely. She said she knew all about the affair, as he had told her, and she knew that he deeply regretted what he had done, and that he bore me no ill-will for the part I had played in the drama, although it had cost him a pretty penny.

I told her that he had impressed me as being a decent fellow, and I asked her if she could help me solve the riddle why he had acted in this way.

"It is the old answer," said she. "'Cherchez la femme'. His wife is as proud as Lucifer. She felt humiliated because the tenant would not give way to her. To appease her pride, he allowed himself to be humiliated and he had a nasty fall."

CHAPTER XIX

THE LITTLE JEWESS

UPON the same day and at the same Court as the case given in the last chapter, commenced the first act of a drama full of tragedy, comedy and surprise, sustained with unusual ferocity.

By the first post that morning, I received a letter from a local War Pensions Committee asking me to look after a woman with five small children who was being persecuted by an agent, and had been summoned that day to give up possession of her rooms.

I discovered her in the lobby of the Court, and introduced her to our solicitor, who took down the facts of the case. She was a slim little Jewess, with black curly hair and sparkling black eyes. Her husband, a Jew, had volunteered for service upon the outbreak of war, and had already fought in Flanders and Italy, and was now with the army in France. She had vacated her home after her husband's departure, to live with a friend for company, but this friend, through bad trade, had been compelled to close her business and give up the premises, and then she had secured the rooms on the upper floor of the house from which she was now about to be turned out.

The reason underlying the application was the desire to sell the house with vacant possession. The tenant of the lower half had accepted a sum of money to leave, and the Jewess would have been only too willing to have done the same, if she could have found another place. Her inability to do this on

account of her family, and the agent's inability to find anything for her, had caused him to try other means to get rid of her. When the case was called, a moth-eaten looking individual came forward and said he was the landlord's agent, and that possession was required because the Jewess had got the rooms by false pretences, saying she had three children instead of five, that her husband was a workman, when he was not, and by giving a false reference, whereby he was led to believe that her mother was in a prosperous way of business.

We had not expected anything like this. It looked at first sight a formidable mountain to get over, but Mr. Schultess Young reduced it to the miserable molehill it really was, when he cross-examined the agent.

"Has this woman lived in these rooms for twelve months?"

"Yes."

"She owes you no rent?"

"No."

"You have nothing to say against her conduct?"

"No."

"Then what is it you are complaining about?"

"Only that she got the rooms by false pretences."

"Do you not think you might have misunderstood her?"

"I don't know."

"Can you say you have never misunderstood anybody before?"

"I don't know."

"When you called upon Madame Rachel for a reference, how do you say she referred to the defendant?"

"She said she was her child."

"She did not say she was her daughter, did she?"

"No."

"She only called her 'My child?'"

"Yes."

The agent called no witnesses, and the Jewess was then examined.

"Did you tell this man, when you went for the rooms that you had three children?"

"Yes, sir, I did," admitted the woman, "but I did not reckon the two little babies."

"Did you tell this man that your husband was a workman?"

"Yes, sir, so he is. He's working at the hardest job there is at present. He is a soldier."

"Did you tell him that Madame Rachel was your mother?"

"No, sir, I said she was a woman who knew me well, as I had dealt at her shop for years."

Then Madame Rachel was asked to step into the witness box. She was one of those dear old expansive Jewesses, exuding kindness at every pore, and one felt instinctively that she could have mothered a nation.

"I did not know I should be wanted," said she, insisting upon telling her story in her own way. "But when my child came to me last night in tears, I told her I would stand by her to-day I told that man I had known her for years, ever since she was a baby, so high She has always been 'My child,' to me I did not say I was her mother, but everybody knows me as Mother Rachel, and all these little ones are my children."

The expression of such wide benevolence was

unusual in such a place. Only upon one other occasion have I heard anything approaching it, and then the witness was a Scottish woman.

But even this unfamiliar utterance of the whole truth did not overcome the Judge's hesitation. He called upon counsel to reply to the charge of saying she had three children when there were five. With legal nimbleness, our counsel applied himself to the task of differentiating between children and babies, and he wound up by asking the judge, in the event of this woman having only three children when she applied for the rooms and she suddenly gave birth to twins upon entering into occupation, whether he would turn her out? This agent would contend he was not informed of the twins, though there could not be any doubt that she had taken them into the house with her.

With some reluctance the Judge dismissed the case, and I did not think the woman would be troubled again.

Two months went by, when Mr. R. S. Pengelly, the assistant editor of "The Star," a good friend to every worthy cause, and a particularly good friend to our home-saving efforts, forwarded me a letter that had been addressed to the editor, with a note saying this seemed to be a most distressing case, asking me to look into it, and do what I could for the writer of it, and report to him.

The writer was a woman with five young children, and the bailliffs were coming the next morning to turn them all into the street. As I read on, it suddenly flashed across me that this was the little Jewess, and I was amazed she had not let me know of her further troubles.

Putting everything aside, I rushed off at once to her assistance. It was at the beginning of January and the weather was terribly cold. A storm raged all the day and the ground was covered several inches deep with snow.

I found her little home at length, looking spotlessly clean, like the outside world at that moment. The floors were scrubbed so white that one could have eaten off them. The children's bedroom had an unusual charm, with all their snow-white beds made up on the shining floor, and the happy little youngsters gazed at me with wondering eyes.

The mother told me that a month after we had won her case, she was called to the Court again, and the same agent came forward and told the same tale. The Judge who was then presiding would not listen to her and had ordered her to get out, and the time expired last night, the warrant for her eviction being applied for whilst we were talking. She explained that she could not write to me for help as she did not know who I was, nor my address. She was not even aware that the War Pensions Committee had asked me to help her in the first case. It was a mystery to her how we knew that she was in trouble, and like angels had suddenly descended to protect her. In her distress a friend had told her to write to "The Star."

The summons showed that the landlord kept a pawnshop in a poor neighbourhood at the other end of London. I resolved at once to beard him in his den, and after instructing her to go to the War Pensions Committee and to tell them what I was doing, and to ask them to do what they could in their way to stop the eviction, I set out again in

the slush and snow.

It was biting cold, and when I found the pawnshop closed, I began to get cold feet. It turned out to be two shops made into one, with a private door in the centre, and my hopes revived when this door gave way to my pressure, and I found myself in a long narrow passage.

I knocked loudly upon the floor several times without response, and then I started calling out for the proprietor, "Albert Edward Blank." After a time there emerged from the gloom at the back, a dirty dishevelled old woman, dressed in grimy black, smelling strongly of drink, who asked me what I wanted.

"I want Albert Edward Blank," said I.

"There ain't no such person," said she.

"Where is he then?" I asked.

"He's dead," she replied.

"When?"

"Last May."

"Been dead ten months?" I commented, hardly believing such luck. "Who are you?"

"I am Mary Ann Blank, his widow. What do you want?" she rejoined, bristling up.

"You will do then," I answered. "You have some small house property at Such-and-such a terrace?"

"Well, what if I have? What's that to do with you?" she replied, steadying herself against the passage wall.

"It has a lot to do with you, madam," I retorted. "Your agent is about to turn into the street a soldier's wife and five little children. I want you to send him a wire at once instructing him not to do so.

I do not suppose you know anything about this, as I find that few landlords know what their agents are doing. Therefore, I appeal to you, Mrs. Blank, not to permit such a thing to be done to one of your own sex and her children, especially upon such a dreadful day as this."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she snapped out. "Why don't you mind your own business?"

"It is My Father's business," said I, gently.

"I don't care anything about you or your father," she snarled, missing the meaning of my remark. "If my agent says they must go, they must go. I know nothing about my houses, and I don't want to be bothered about them."

"Except the rents, I suppose," said I, getting angry in order to warm myself. "You will have to know something about this one. This woman's husband is risking his life for the safety of your dirty little pawnshop. Here's the telegraph form. I'll write the message to your agents and you will sign it. Come on. I've very little time to lose."

"I shan't do anything of the sort. Get out of my shop. I've never been spoken to like this before. Where do you come from?" she raved.

"I have been asked by the Press to investigate this scandalous case," said I, becoming cool again. "If you want a cheap advertisement, you shall have one to-morrow in every paper for nothing, I can promise you. If you take my advice, you will write to your agent to-night. If not, worse may befall you. I don't know what the world is coming to. Tenants are now being kicked out with dead men's shoes."

From the nearest post office, I despatched two long telegrams, one to the agent, and the other to the

War Pensions Committee. I warned the agent of the risk he ran in executing the warrant, which had been obtained in the name of a dead man. And I asked the Pensions Committee to see that proceedings were stopped.

Next morning I telephoned to the War Pensions, who were curious to know what I had said to the old woman, as she had written a furious letter to the agent, who had brought it to them with my telegram as soon as their office was opened. They said I had scared him, that he had dropped the eviction, and they had paid him five weeks' rent so that the woman was secure for some time.

Now we thought that the Jewess would have peace at last, but tigresses are not so easily tamed as lions, for another summons came along in about a month, this time in the name of Mary Ann.

Four weeks elapsed and again we appeared at the Court, to find that the agent had engaged counsel to assist him. The Judge was ill, and was replaced by a Judge from another Court. No mention was made of obtaining the rooms by false pretences, this time, but the agent and four witnesses put forward a story that the Jewess and her children were such a nuisance and annoyance in the house, that tenants in the downstairs rooms had been compelled to leave, and the landlady was at a loss because she could not let them again whilst the Jewess was there.

The agent and his witnesses were allowed to develop their story. Our counsel contented himself merely with pinning the agent down to the fact that he had never mentioned the complaints of nuisance in his two previous cases against the Jewess, and he drew from him the statement that these alleged acts

had been committed in the middle of February. His witnesses agreed to this date, and finding that they were not being challenged they let themselves go in abuse of our little woman.

The landlord's case being completed, our counsel rose and asked the Judge for his ruling whether this summons was in order, as this case had already been decided by that Court, a judgment given, and a warrant for ejectment issued. Why did not the plaintiff proceed to execute the warrant he already possessed?

This bombshell blew up the landlord's case. The agent's counsel had not been informed of any previous proceedings. Upon looking up the former summons the Judge saw that Albert Edward was the landlord, not Mary Ann, so as she had not taken out letters of administration or probate, she could not sue, because the Jewess was not her tenant. Latin words and legal phrases weighted the arguments for a time, and finally the Judge, after warning the agent he would have to consider his position seriously, adjourned the case to be heard by the Judge who had dealt with it upon the last occasion.

I discovered there was more behind this evidence than appeared upon the surface, as the downstairs tenant, who had been bought out, had suddenly appeared in the rooms again on February 8th, and she had led the Jewess and her family a fearful life for a fortnight, when she had as suddenly disappeared again.

It was therefore with some confidence that we journeyed to the Court again for the next hearing, which was on a Saturday in the middle of March. This was one of the most anxious and depressing days in the war, as the whole nation knew that the

Germans in great force were making their supreme dash for victory against our much smaller army, and that they boasted they would break through and seize the Channel ports.

The first news we heard at the Court was that the Judge had died the day before, and that a newly appointed deputy Judge would replace him for this sitting. The new Judge was a younger man than the generality of Judges, with a touch of human sympathy and a sense of humour; and the glow of health upon his face inspired our faith in obtaining a wise judgment.

As letters of administration had been taken out by Mary Ann during the adjournment, it was decided to start the case afresh.

The agent had seven witnesses now to support him. Again our counsel contented himself with a few questions to the agent, reminding him that at the last hearing he had said the nuisance and annoyance occurred about the middle of February, and now definitely fixing the earliest date of this at February 15th.

In County Courts, unlike Police Courts, all the witnesses sit in the Court, and hear everything that is said. So that, in a case like this, where the evidence has been manufactured for the purpose, by fixing the first Ananias, and especially the father of the tribe, upon a certain date, you set a standard of veracity to which all subsequent witnesses feel bound to conform.

The seven witnesses were exceedingly pleased with themselves. Not one of them let the agent down, I am thankful to say. They all backed him up in cross-examination about the date. They were cross-

questioned about nothing else, although much might have been asked, as their evidence was of the filthiest description possible to conceive. Foul and obscene words were said to have been written by the children upon the walls of the lavatory and passages, although none of the children could write, and the Jewess was reviled in the most shameful manner. She grew restless and could not understand why her counsel took no notice of the allegations, and in her boiling indignation she suddenly escaped from my keeping, and rushing up to the desk where the Judge sat, frantically raising her arms and her voice, appealed to him in a tragic manner to protect her from her lying enemies. The Judge quietly told her to leave the matter in the hands of her counsel who well knew what he was doing, and I had a strenuous time in keeping her from breaking loose again during the rest of the hearing.

The Judge made every witness repeat and spell out every vile word and expression, and he led them on by his seeming trust in their statements to exaggerate their own exaggerations.

The last witness was the woman who had formerly lived in the downstairs rooms, and she was the most venomous of all. When she had finished playing her part, which was obviously over-acted, the Judge for the first time gave any indication of his opinion, by telling her that he did not believe a word she had said.

Turning to the agent's counsel, he asked him, in order to shorten the case, now that all his evidence had been called, to say what point he relied upon. The counsel said he relied upon his proof of nuisance and annoyance.

With a broad grin, the Judge inquired whether he had observed what his learned opponent had been doing. All his questions had been put to show that if a nuisance and annoyance had taken place, it could not have been until February the 15th, and every one of his witnesses had agreed with this. Now, if he would look at his summons he would find that that was issued on February 3rd, so that this alleged nuisance could not have been the reason for requiring possession, as it was said to have occurred twelve days afterwards.

"Have you any other ground?" said the Judge.

"We also claim possession because rent is in arrear," replied the counsel.

"Unfortunately for you," answered the Judge, smiling all over his face, "I have before me a letter from the War Pensions Committee, in which they say they paid five weeks' rent in January in advance, which paid up all rent to February the 8th. Therefore there was no rent due on the date the summons was taken out. As these are your only grounds I dismiss the case with costs."

As I was leaving the Court, the clerk called me aside, and showed me a most pathetic letter received at the Court that morning from the husband of our tenant, stating that he had been selected for the front firing line in the great battle to be fought that day. He did not expect that he would come through alive, and his last appeal to his country was that his wife and children should not be turned into the street.

Whilst we were fighting this battle on behalf of the wife her husband was fighting the most terrible battle for us during the war. He was reported

missing, but after some months he was discovered to have been taken prisoner.

Early one morning, nearly a year later, before I was dressed, there was a loud knocking at my door. I rushed downstairs to find a post office boy with a telegram, a message of great joy and full of good tidings. It was from the husband of the little Jewess to tell me that he was released, and had just arrived home, and he felt it his first duty to thank me for having secured him a home to come back to, and for having protected his wife and children whilst he was away.

CHAPTER XX

LORD HUNTER'S COMMITTEE

IN April, 1918, a Committee was set up by Dr. Addison, in connection with his Ministry of Reconstruction, to consider the legislation embodied in the Rent Act in relation to the housing of the working classes after the war, and to recommend what steps, if any, should be taken to remove any difficulties which might arise in connection therewith.

As Mr. Edwin Evans had been asked to serve upon it, a number of Members of Parliament considered that the tenants' interest as well as the landlords' should be represented, and after numerous questions in the House of Commons, Dr. Addison asked me to become a member of it, and I accepted the appointment.

The Hon. Lord Hunter, who had conducted the Scottish inquiry in 1915. that preceded the first Rent Act, acted as Chairman; and an energetic young Scotsman, Mr. William Wallace, fulfilled the duties of secretary.

The Committee consisted of His Honour Judge Mellor, of Manchester; Mr. B. Seebohm Rowntree, the authority upon housing, wages and conditions of living; Mr. W. J. Board, Town Clerk of Nottingham; Mr. E. M. Gibbs, architect from Sheffield; Mr. W. A. Lindsay, M.P. for Belfast; Mr. E. C. P. Lascelles, of the Ministry of Munitions, and Mr. W. B. Neville, the Secretary of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, Woolwich.

His Honour Judge Mellor, Mr. Edwin Evans

and myself were the only members of the Committee who had any practical experience of the working of the Rent Act, and we each of us viewed this legislation from different standpoints.

I soon found a friend in Mr. Neville, whose knowledge of the housing difficulties of members of his Society fitted in with my own experiences, and enabled us eventually to collaborate in a minority report.

Committee work is not an enviable job, especially when taken seriously. Five hours of listening intently to witnesses and asking questions upon intricate details is quite enough for any day. But it does not end there, as piles of memoranda have to be read and considered at home.

Nothing was more annoying than to find the Minister of Reconstruction heckled daily in Parliament, by people who were quite comfortable with their investments in War Loan Stock, about the huge sums the country was paying for Committees such as this. No member of this Committee received any payment as far as I am aware, not even out-of-pocket expenses. We willingly gave our time and services to the nation in the hope that after the war there would be a reconstruction upon a better and fairer basis. But an ugly spirit was already manifesting itself in certain quarters, and this opposition to the preparation of schemes for the just re-settlement of the country was but one indication of it.

About this time, a soldier's widow, against whom an ejectment order had been made, wrote to her Member of Parliament, and she sent me his off-hand reply that Parliament could not prevent such

things happening. I wrote to him asking for an interview, as I thought I might be able to suggest means whereby Parliament could help this widow and others like her.

He made an appointment at the swagger offices of a new party he had started. As I entered the door, I noticed a large poster over the premises, announcing in bold characters, "We are preparing for the great push after the war."

The great man was too busy to keep his appointment, so he sent out a young secretary to tell me that he was in full sympathy with my work and would help me if he could, but he wanted to know first how far I was going.

How far was I going? That seemed a queer question to ask, especially as he was in sympathy with our work. Of course I was going on with it. I said I saw they were out for the great push after the war. So was I, as far as I understood the words, but I had not realised before that a push could be made in opposite directions. Mine was the push forward. As they seemed to have some doubt about it, I supposed that their push must be the push backward. I think I must have hit the mark, as the secretary vanished, and did not return, although I waited some time. With many reconstruction was a synonym for retrogression.

After a few sittings of the Committee I began to perceive that its attitude was like that of the County Court; it took notice only of what was put before it, and treated facts and prejudices alike. It was not an inquiry in the proper sense of the word; it had no power to call for books and accounts so that statements could be tested.

The lawyers, the mortgagees and the property owners from all parts of the country sent their representatives, exceptionally capable men, who were accustomed to appear before such bodies, and knew to a nicety exactly how to state their case.

There was a great danger of the tenants' case not being adequately presented. No Labour Member of Parliament could be got to assist us, and although such Labour men as Mr. W. Mellor, Mr. W. Harris, Mr. J. Silas Whybrew and Councillor Andrew M'Bride furnished the Committee with useful facts, they dealt, more or less, with a particular locality and mainly with one section of the people. To get a presentation of the question upon a larger scale was my difficulty. Mr. James H. Cully, J.P., and Mr. H. Schultess Young placed their views before us, but still something more comprehensive was required. I found myself handicapped by being a member of the Committee, as I was unable to give evidence, or to bring forward the material I had at my command.

Mr. Will Crooks, M.P., had been appointed upon this Committee, and his wide acquaintance with our problems would have been invaluable, but he was prevented by illness from attending. Being in Poplar one day, I called upon him. He was getting very feeble, but was just as cheerful and ready to help as ever. He was amused when I told him I thought I was to take part in an investigation, but had woke up to find myself in the midst of a fight of a most subtle character. When I asked him to give me a few tips concerning Committee warfare, and also to supply me with some ammunition by coming for an hour to give evidence, he referred me to

Mr. Sidney Webb, saying that Mr. Webb knew the last word about Committees for he had been connected with more of them than any man who had ever lived.

As a parting word of advice, Mr. Will Crooks said to me, "Don't let it worry you. You should follow my practice. I always sat quietly, and let them talk, and I amused myself by drawing funny faces all over the blotting paper. When the report was drawn up, I wrote one of my own, and nearly always found that more of my recommendations were adopted than theirs."

Within a few days I called upon Mr. Sidney Webb by appointment. Perched upon the fender seat, he burst forth at my first question with a clear and witty description of Committee work, and a penetrating criticism of its defects, and followed this up with an astonishingly up-to-date appreciation of the housing difficulty. I was charmed to find that at close quarters our strictly matter-of-fact professor was so wonderfully human, with such a sense of humour. Then there was a delightful interruption by the arrival of Mrs. Sidney Webb, who explained she must take her husband away at once to buy some clothes, otherwise she feared he would be run in by the police, as he never thought of himself. To Mrs. Sidney Webb's happy intervention we doubtless owe the safe arrival of her husband a few weeks later, when he gave evidence before the Committee concerning the past, present and future of housing.

The principal recommendation of the Committee was that the Act should be continued for a period of three years from the termination of the war.

The majority of the Committee, however, wanted modifications made solely in the interests of the owner and the mortgagee.

The owners felt they would be ruined if restrictions were not continued upon mortgage interest and powers of foreclosure, whilst the mortgagees were grieved that they could not obtain repayment of their money in order to re-invest at higher rates of interest. The owners now began to forsake the tenants' company; they no longer needed their assistance in saving their property, and they were quite pleased to agree to the mortgagee having more interest, provided they did not have to pay it out of their own pockets. So the proposal was that the tenant should pay fifteen per cent. more rent, of which the owner would receive one-third and the mortgagee the other two-thirds.

Against this, Mr. Neville and I strongly protested in our minority report, and suggested means whereby, if an increase of interest could be justified, it should not fall on the tenant.

The owners also had a grievance about the higher cost of repairs, but as very few repairs were being done, this was not urgent. It was generally considered reasonable that where repairs were carried out an increase was justified to meet the extra cost of labour and material. A flat rate of twenty-five per cent. of the rent, we pointed out, was inequitable, and the safeguards to the tenant that he should receive value for this increase were inadequate. Several minor points of adjustment were dealt with, but the most immediate reform was indicated solely in our minority report, where we advocated the extension of the Act to houses of a higher rental so that middle

class tenants should have some protection.

Following Mr. Will Crooks' experience this recommendation of the minority report was the first urgent matter to be dealt with by the new Parliament.

The Armistice was declared on November 11th, and a general election was immediately entered upon. At this election, the War Rents League supported all those candidates who had helped tenants in Parliament, irrespective of parties. It was not until after the elections were finished that the report of Lord Hunter's Committee was issued.

A month or so before the Armistice I paid a visit to the North of England and to Glasgow to investigate personally the conditions of housing prevailing there.

I spent a day in Middlesborough, and I came thoroughly to understand how it is that Mr. Trevelyan Thomson, the member for that town, is a fierce enthusiast for the betterment of the houses of the poor. To return Mr. Thomson to Parliament, unopposed, shows an intelligence that one would not have expected from the dwellers in such hovels, and also a keen appreciation of the whole-hearted efforts their member makes on their behalf.

Middlesborough by day is depressing enough, but by night I found it unbearable. I could not get a bed as every hotel was filled with naval and military officers. There was nothing to do and nothing to see, so to while away the time until past eleven when a train left for Scotland, I patronised a music hall which I discovered in my wanderings. This was equally as depressing as its surroundings. It had one advantage, it was warm, which enabled me to sleep soundly through the performance.

I thought I should be all right when I boarded the train for Scotland, but when I reached Darlington something after midnight, I was turned out and told I should have to wait for over two hours. It was a bitter night, and had just started to snow, so I inquired my way to an hotel, and was allowed to sit by the coffee room fire until one o'clock, when I was again turned into the cold world as no beds were available, even the couches being occupied. Back again to the station I went, and after wandering up and down the platform awhile, I ventured to peep into the waiting room to see if it were warmer there.

As I opened the door, I saw it was a large room, with a blazing fire at the further end, and a score or more of Tommies lying around it upon their kitbags. They were covered with mud and dirt, and looked tired out. One of them nearest the fire offered me his seat, the only chair in the room, and he took his place with his comrades on the floor. I found they had come over from France upon a short leave, and were making their way home north. Hearing that they were a part of the Durham Light Infantry, I asked if they knew an officer named Claud Lovat Fraser, the young artist, who afterwards was to make a reputation in the production of "*The Beggar's Opera*."

As soon as I mentioned Fraser's name they all sat up and began to take interest in me. "He was with us at Ypres, when we had a bad time and he got shell-shock. I know, a fine fellow," said one. "I could always get on with him better than with any of them," exclaimed another. "Don't you remember, Jock," said another to his friend, "what

a grand cigarette case he had, and how he would hand it round to us. And they were cigarettes, too!" "He was a great lad," said another. "He would draw stunning things to make us laugh, and one day he did a picture of me to send home to my old mother, and wasn't she pleased? Not 'arf."

"As you are a friend of Fraser's, what will you have?" said one of them, getting upon his feet. "I am afraid we can only offer you woodbines, as Old Bill there has emptied the bottle." So for an hour and a half I shared their woodbines and kept them interested in the fascinating dandy who had shared their bombed trenches with them, and told them of what his friends expected he would yet do for the world in the realms of Art.

These soldiers were little more than boys, rough miners taken from the pits of Durham and Northumberland, yet I am sure no greater tribute could have been paid to the inimitable charm of Lovat Fraser's personality that he would have appreciated more than this chance meeting at midnight around the waiting room fire.

A few days spent in Edinburgh among the many storied tenements, up and down the closes off the High Street and beyond, was a mild preparation for the unparalleled collection of slums that was to be found in Glasgow.

Edinburgh should be a warning to those housing reformers whose ideas of extending housing accommodation do not take them beyond the sub-division of existing houses. Fine old houses, some with panelled walls, have been divided and sub-divided until each room has been partitioned off several times, and each part let as a separate dwelling, until

what were at one time fine and stately residences are now nothing but overcrowded dens. For years has this been a most profitable enterprise with landlords, with but little regulation or control from any governing body, and as a similar policy is now being recklessly pursued in the large towns of England, our local bodies should have powers to impose strict conditions before it is too late.

In Glasgow, private enterprise in workmen's dwellings has without a doubt exceeded itself. If expansion and the erection of new dwellings had been its aim instead of crowding as many into as small an area as possible, Glasgow would not be in the unenviable plight it is to-day.

In many districts the housing conditions are indescribable; thirty or forty tenements opening out upon a dark, dank narrow passage, that is never visited by the light of the sun, begrimed with the dirt of ages, that nothing but destruction can obliterate, back yards piled high with the refuse of hundreds of occupiers, who daily descend the winding staircases built out like bastion towers from these great castles of gloom, to add their daily contribution to the surrounding squalor.

I had the privilege of attending a meeting of the City Council, where Mr. J. Wheatley and his colleagues were pressing forward the claims of housing with a religious fervour, and of conversing with them after the meeting upon the gigantic problems that surrounded them. I also had the advantage of Councillor M'Bride as my guide through this slum-land of Scotland.

On my way back to London, I visited Gretna, then occupied and busy. At the beginning of the war

this was an insignificant little village, but because the country needed it, it had been built up in no time, and laid out as a comfortable town. Evidently, where there's a will, there's a way.

CHAPTER XXI

PROTECTION FOR MIDDLE CLASSES

IN the midst of the General Election I was given notice to vacate my office. This was the fourth time I had had to move on, but as this was a progressive movement, marching on was in the nature of things. Upon this occasion, I had made a fatal mistake by paying the rent, although this could not have been met without the generous help of two well-known literary men, Mr. J. Middleton Murry and Mr. J. Heron Lepper, who came to our assistance.

The rent paid cleared the amount owing by the tenant of the rooms, and immediately he was free from his obligations he gave notice, and I had to look elsewhere.

I saw there was a room to let just opposite, and I bespoke it. But whilst electioneering, a cigarette maker offered more for it, and cut me out. Whilst waiting for another room, which I never got, I was permitted to interview callers at a window in the lobby, using the window sill as a desk.

The cessation of hostilities soon made it evident that quite a number of people had been eagerly waiting for the great push after the war. Their chief aim was to push tenants out so that they could be in at the great post-war gamble.

Having patriotically celebrated the Armistice in magnificent style, the owners of houses above £35 rateable value in London, and £26 elsewhere, returned home and got down to business next day. They started without delay sending letters to their tenants telling them that now the war was over, they were

advised that owing to the shortage of houses, there would be a great demand, and that now was the time to sell to advantage. Therefore they required possession at March quarter-day.

Agents went methodically through their books, and notified every owner they had ever dealt with that now was their chance to get a big price. A letter from an agent was delivered at a friend's house addressed to the former owner, who had been dead for sixteen years, advising him to sell; so there can be little doubt about who were the organisers of the great push.

Middle-class tenants all over London and for miles around were seized with panic. Fifty people a week were knocking at my door with orders to view, but not one was ever admitted for this purpose. In the surrounding district others were being similarly worried.

"You must let me in," one woman said, "as Father's sold his house and we have nowhere to go."

"I'm selling your house for your agent, and if you won't let me in I shall sue you for the commission I shall lose," said another old woman, who was daily bringing people to view in order to make a few more pounds to be spent on dress.

Some neighbours were doing nothing but show people over their houses all day long. And such people, too! Some of the women had no sense of decency—they would open cupboards and wardrobes, and pry into every nook and corner. And within a short time an epidemic of burglaries commenced.

One old man would bring round prospective buyers

and peer in through the windows, until I threatened to give him in charge as a suspicious character.

I interviewed the local Police Inspector and notified Scotland Yard and the Home Office, asking them to warn householders, both for their own sakes and that of their neighbours, to refuse to admit strangers into their houses or allow them to view the back parts of the premises.

I was gradually collecting material for my great push when one afternoon fortune smiled upon me. I was in the house alone, there was a ring at the bell, and unsuspectingly I opened the door, to find standing there a distressed little lady armed with an order to view, and a long list of houses for sale. I invited her in, and asked her about her trouble. She had come all the way across London from Golders Green, where her house was to be sold over her head. She was being worried with callers, and she herself had worried other people in a similar fashion, as she had been looking everywhere for a house to rent or for one within her limited means, to buy. I discovered that the house in which she lived did not exceed £35 rateable value, so that she was already protected by the Rent Act. I explained this to her, and sent her away happy.

She presented me with the list of houses for sale, which contained thirty in Chiswick, and she sent me on all the other lists she had collected from agents in other districts.

No sooner had she gone than another visitor arrived upon the same errand. She came from Finchley, and her house was also within the Rent Act. So away she went smiling, leaving another list of twenty more houses for sale behind her.

Within an hour there was another ring, and this time the lady was from Ealing. She was just outside the protection of the Act. I explained matters and told her what to do, and she left me her catalogue of tenanted houses for sale, which added another twenty to my list.

That afternoon I scored seventy not out, which with those I already had, brought up my total to a hundred.

During the next week I visited everyone of these tenants, and instructed them not to allow anyone to look over their houses, and I took down all the facts concerning them, and their circumstances.

As this was a growing menace to the life and comfort of the people of Chiswick, it was of sufficient importance to warrant the calling of a Town's meeting, but I decided to adopt a less imposing method of dealing with it.

At that time there was in existence an influential body representative of every phase of thought in the district, called the Chiswick Residents' Committee, since re-named the Chiswick Civic Association. Under the Chairmanship of Major Goldman (formerly M.P. for Falmouth), this organisation had been successful in preventing the Duke's Meadows from being utilised for gas works, and in preserving them for the public benefit.

I approached Major Goldman, and he called a meeting of the Committee at his charming and historic residence, Walpole House, in the large room adorned with paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti.

The mass of facts so astounded the meeting that it was resolved to adjourn for a week in order that every member of the Committee should be present

and be asked to bring with him authentic cases within his own knowledge.

At the next meeting, there were present parsons, doctors, councillors, barristers, property owners, architects, accountants, brewers, shopkeepers, engineers, etc., and the list of cases in the district was increased to two hundred and fifty. It was unanimously agreed that the Government must be called upon to step in to protect our fellow citizens of the middle classes, and a small sub-committee composed of Major Goldman, Mr. Warwick Draper, the Rev. C. W. Sykes, Mr. J. Sander, and myself was formed to take what measures we thought effective.

Major Goldman generously undertook the expense of having three lists of the investigated cases, and also four hundred letters to Members of Parliament, typed and posted. The lists with full details were sent confidentially to the Prime Minister, the President of the Local Government Board, and to Colonel Grant Morden, the Member for the district.

Immediately this was received by Colonel Grant Morden, he wrote asking for an interview with the Committee, and I was deputed to call upon him. Although I had opposed him at the election as vigorously as I was able, I found him eager and willing to do what he could for all sections of the community, irrespective of party.

His attention had already been called to many of the cases, and he therefore knew our petition to be well founded. He suggested that as he had just been appointed Chairman of the Middlesex Members that he should call them together and lay the facts before them. Without delay this was done,

and he approached the Government at their request so effectively that within a month from the time of the meeting of the Chiswick Residents' Committee, the Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher introduced a Government measure extending the Rent Act to houses of a higher value.

As soon as the Bill was printed, Colonel Grant Morden met me at the House of Commons with Mr. Kennedy Jones and Mr. Lloyd Graeme, and we drew up together amendments to make the Bill more useful. The amendments were entered in the names of all these members, but as Colonel Grant Morden was forced to leave at once for Canada, it was arranged that Mr. Kennedy Jones should move them in committee. In the circumstances, I do not see what more the member for Chiswick could have done to ensure the success of the measure. The sequel, however, should be a warning to Parliamentary candidates to be careful in future when speaking of a member's record in the House. At the next election a poster was issued inferring that Colonel Grant Morden was not in favour of this Bill because he was absent from all the divisions upon it. I felt bound to come forward and give support to the man who had done more than any member to get this measure brought into Parliament.

The new Rent Act of 1919 extended protection up to a limit of £70 a year rent in London, £60 in Scotland, and £52 elsewhere. If these figures had applied to the rateable value as well as the rent, as was at first intended, but withdrawn through the timidity of Ministers, another extension of the Act would not have been required the following year, and much distress and hardship prevented.

Ten per cent. increase was allowed to be added to the 1914 rents of the houses brought into the Act for the first time, and one half per cent. increase for mortgage interest.

The Act of 1918 preventing a new purchaser from claiming possession was destroyed by permitting the Court to make an order if it considered it reasonable, after considering all the circumstances of the case, including alternative accomodation for the tenant.

Parliament was led astray by all kinds of specious arguments, and instead of simplifying the Act, so that it would work more smoothly, added complicated and unworkable clauses about furnished lodgings and sub-letting.

Although some breathing time for the harassed middle classes had been secured, the agents had been granted a free run again in the profitable game of selling houses over the heads of sitting tenants, whose only protection was a perfunctory discretion of the Court.

In the April of 1919, there came into being through the efforts of Muriel, Countess de la Warr, Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, Mr. H. Baillie-Weaver, and Major Graham Pole, an organisation called "The Arts League of Service," whose chief object was to stimulate the spirit of creative art in all sections of the community. Miss Eleanor Elder, one of the Honorary Secretaries, has planned and organised, and manages with the co-operation of Miss Judith Wogan, a travelling theatre, which journeys from village to village throughout the length and breadth of England and Scotland, carrying the company, scenery and properties upon a motor-lorry, and which presents to dwellers in remote rustic places,

performances of the best modern plays together with a programme of folk songs. These tours have met with so much appreciation both from the country people, and from those who are working to make life in our villages more attractive, and their educational value has been so firmly established, that the Carnegie Trustees have acknowledged their worth by assisting in their extension.

Miss Ana Berry, the other Honorary Secretary, has devoted her attention to assisting the artists themselves, and especially in encouraging young pioneers. At the outset of her work she discovered that one of her greatest problems was the housing question. There was no room for artists to live and work in London. Many had been turned out of their studio flats, upon one pretext or another, for the accommodation of refugees, and now that the refugees had returned home, the war profiteers had taken their places. Any old thing had come to be considered good enough for the artists, such as attics, stables, and even greenhouses, yet these were now unattainable. The young men returning from the war, with a fierce reaction against the disciplined work of destruction, were eager to regain the joy of life by creating something of beauty and of worth.

They soon found they were not wanted. They were willing to pay their way, but private builders would not build for them. Therefore they approached the Arts League of Service, who drew up a scheme for the erection of a block of residential studios, which would be big enough, light enough, and quiet enough and at reasonable rents. The premises were designed and the plans worked out by Mr. C. R. Mackintosh, a well-known architect

of studios, and they were approved on every hand. The Government was asked to facilitate the work by granting a subsidy, as was being done to help the erection of other flats, or to grant assistance to a public utility company which would be formed for carrying out the work. But a blank refusal was received upon the ground that a studio was a living room and a workshop combined, and Government assistance could only be granted in connection with living rooms. Mr. H. R. Aldridge, of the Housing and Town Planning Association, interceded for us, pointing out that a studio was a living room with more light than ordinary, but all to no purpose.

The scheme is still in abeyance. Some day, we may have a Government that will consider the artist. Some day when Mr. Winston Churchill is seated before his easel he may have a kindly thought for the young aspirant. If so, he will find some useful precedents in Paris. Not only was the artist's home and atelier protected throughout the war, but it still enjoys immunity from the profiteer, and quite recently the City of Paris has started building studio flats upon part of the ground formerly occupied by the fortifications.

The London County Council ought to complete their services on behalf of Art, for the teaching of which they have erected magnificent buildings, by adopting some scheme like this, which would enable artists to work as well as study under favourable conditions.

CHAPTER XXII.

“HOW MUCH DO YOU GET?”

THE demobilisation of the Army, gradual though it was, daily added its contribution to the mass of trouble, which eventually accumulated and descended upon me like an avalanche, and drove me not only from my window sill, but also from another office that succeeded it.

I had had my fears of what would happen when the boys came back, and by every means in my power had I tried to avert it. But I did not anticipate that the distress would be so wide-spread, or so appalling.

When the heroes returned to look for the homes they had fought for, and for the “Homes for Heroes” that had been promised to them, they could not believe their eyes. Some had no home at all to return to, whilst others found the mere fragment of one, in which there was no room for them.

In spite of all our efforts, and the generous assistance of the press in informing its readers constantly of their position under the law, many thousands of homes had been wrecked, which have never been replaced.

Many an afternoon during the last three years of the war, did I visit the numerous districts in the East End, where Mr. George Lansbury and his helpers held gatherings of soldiers' wives, for the purpose of lightening their worries. Under Mr. Lansbury's inspiring leadership, the almost overwhelming details connected with separation allowances, pensions, ration tickets and a host of other matters for which

the filling up of forms was required, were explained to these women, and everything was done by his voluntary band of workers to keep the home fires burning.

The greatest grievance at all these assemblies was the treatment the women received from the Committees appointed to supplement their allowances in case of need. They were informed they could apply for a rent allowance, which was to be paid, I believe, from the Prince of Wales's Fund, but whenever an application was made, the woman was put through a minutely detailed examination. The home was not treated as a unit, it was looked upon as so many rooms. If she said she had four rooms she was told they were too many, she must give up two or sub-let them, thus saving half her rent; she could then sell the surplus furniture, and would in that way not require any relief from the fund. Others were advised to give up their houses and go into the country and stay with relatives.

One by one, families were squeezed into fewer rooms, or got out of the houses altogether. The empty houses were promptly let to refugees. Now the men had returned they found it impossible to share this limited space with their wives and families; there was no way of getting back to their former number of rooms, which was more necessary than ever, as the children were growing up; being four years older than when the war started. In fact, they were told there was no room for them in the home that had inspired their service.

When others went to look for their former residences, they were delighted to find them empty. But the owner was adamant, he would not re-let. It was

useless for the soldier to tell him he was morally entitled to the residence as he had fought for it, whilst the owner had remained at home in comfort making huge profits. He could only reflect how differently these matters were arranged in France, where his French comrade's home was treated as sacred; no one was allowed to touch it whilst he was at the war, and immediately he was released he could go straight back again, and begin to pick up the threads of his former life.

In Forest Gate, five houses stood empty side by side, the front gardens being decorated with notices for sale. Five ex-Service men came to me, former tenants of these houses, and we went together and interviewed the owner. The refugees had just left and returned to their own land. But for these men they would have had no land to call their own, and but for them also, this owner might not have had any houses to his name. He refused them tenancies again. Now was the appointed time for selling; if he delayed the Government might build and he would not get such a good price; he could get enough for them to enable him to retire. We also had to retire.

These Committees of titled ladies doubtless thought they were doing a noble work, but they acted without imagination and vision. They were too well trained in the methods of charity organisation, and could not realise that these applicants for relief were neither beggars nor paupers, but the beloved wives and children of our self-sacrificing citizen army.

I was dragged away one morning by a weeping woman dressed in black, who had a pitiful story to tell. Her husband was with the Army in the East,

and her child had just died. She had no money to pay for the funeral. To meet such cases as these, so that our soldiers' children should not have paupers' graves, these Committees were authorised to advance the necessary expenses. The woman had made an application, and was told to get a quotation from the undertaker, which had been approved, and the order given to him to proceed. All arrangements had been made for the burial to take place that day, but the Committee would not give her the money to pay for the funeral. The undertaker had been to the house, and as she could not pay him he had removed the dead child from the coffin, and taken the coffin away, saying he had "had some" of these Committees before.

I was revolted beyond measure, and the distress of the woman was terrible to witness, so I went with her to the office of the Committee, where a young girl tried to brush us aside by saying her ladyship was engaged and could not see us, and that the matter would be attended to in due course. I stormed the place, and after telling them all what I thought of them, I came away with the money. Then the undertaker underwent another torrent of wrath. It was with very bitter feelings that I accompanied the distressed mother to the cemetery.

Private employers were being appealed to, to give the men back the situations they had left, and a Roll of Honour was set up for those who pledged themselves to help the heroes get on their feet again. No such appeal was made to private property owners to give the men back their homes, which were quite as necessary, if not more so, as their jobs. There was a general refusal everywhere to let, as the rents

were regulated, but as no restriction was placed upon the price of houses for sale, selling was the order of the day.

What was more, the returning soldier had been granted a gratuity, which the house agents looked upon with greedy eyes. Whenever an ex-Service man went after a house to rent, he was immediately asked how much gratuity he had received, and was then told that if he would deposit that with them they would sell him a "nice little place." And the "nice little place" they sold him was one already tenanted by a family. So, the trouble grew and grew.

Late one Friday, a poor woman called upon me, dragging at her tail a small boy who had lost one eye, and another youngster who had been run over and met with an accident to his leg. This appeared to be an unfortunate family, but mere physical misfortunes were nothing to that dire calamity, the loss of a home. She was a widow with eight children, and had occupied the four lower rooms in a house in the East End for twenty years. Her eldest boy had volunteered for the war, and was to be demobilised in a few weeks, so she had asked the agent to white-wash and paper her boy's bedroom, and make it clean for his homecoming. She felt that this was the most practical way to welcome him back after he had endured the dirt of the trenches so long. The agent at once ceased coming for the rent, so after a few weeks she called in the Sanitary Inspector, who gave orders for all the rooms in the house to be done up. She had sub-let the upper part of the house to another woman who also had eight children, and whose husband had gone to the war and was reported missing. Upon receipt of the sanitary notice, the

agent had taken out a summons for possession of the whole house, and as the woman did not know how to defend herself, an order had been made for her and her sub-tenant to be turned out. This order expired on Saturday, and the agent had been round that morning to tell her they were all going to be put into the street next day.

I knew the agent well, a heartless brute, and I was aware that any appeal to him would be useless. The Town Clerk of the Borough had but a short time before asked me to do my best to exterminate him, as he was a pest to the neighbourhood.

She did not know her landlord, but she thought that the lease had recently fallen in, as a few months back she had received a letter from a firm in the City asking her to pay her rent in future to this agent.

I had never heard of this firm. The letter paper suggested some petty lawyer in a top back room in some buildings. But as there was a telephone number, and time was short, I rang them up.

"Hallo!" said I. "I understand you have property in Such-a street. And that you are turning out two widows and sixteen children into the street to-morrow. Some event this! Could you tell me at what time it is to take place? Yes, I want to know the time, as I intend to be there. I also want to advertise it in the "Arrangements for To-day," column of "The Times." I am asking two illustrated papers and a number of Sunday Journals to send their photographers there too. Of course, you will be there? You don't mean to say you will miss such a function?"

It seems I had got on to a clerk, who was rather mystified by my arrangements. He suggested we

had better talk the matter over, and at my request he appointed Monday morning for the interview, giving me his word that nothing would be done until after we had met.

I asked the woman to bring me her rent books, her summons and all papers referring to the matter, and with these I proceeded to keep the appointment. Instead of a back room, it was a palatial suite of offices, with a superior staff of clerks and attendants, that I entered.

The clerk to whom I had spoken on the telephone told me that he knew very little about the business as he had only just returned from the Army, but I gathered from him that the lease had expired and there was some trouble with the old lessee about dilapidations. It was the old story that the agent had taken proceedings on his own initiative. If I would wait a while he would consult his principal.

Ten minutes elapsed, when the clerk re-appeared and beckoned me into an adjoining room, saying, "Sir John will see you."

My lions were going up in the social scale ! I was not far out when I thought this a function befitting "The Times" !

With a feeling of awe, I entered Sir John's sanctum, and took a seat as requested in a magnificent leather covered easy chair. Sir John was a tall elderly man, with the air of a chairman of a Bench of Petty Justices, and was seated opposite to me at a table, lighted by a window on his right, that extended from the ceiling to the floor. After leisurely arranging his papers and his blotting pad, and adjusting his pince-nez, and giving a slight cough to clear his throat, he fixed me with his eyes, and com-

menced in a truly magisterial manner, as though he were dealing with a prisoner, "What is your name?"

I told him. He asked me to spell it, and I did, and he wrote it down as though upon a charge sheet.

"What is your address?" he continued in the same tone of voice. I told him, and I also spelt that for him.

"What are you?" he went on in the same key. This was beginning to amuse me.

"I am the Honorary Secretary of the 'War Rents League,' whose work in the world is to protect the homes of the people in these abnormal times," I replied, and I watched him write that down, too.

Just as he was about to put another question to me, I decided that it was now my turn to ask a few.

"Who is the landlord of these premises?" I inquired holding up the tenant's rent book, in the manner he had adopted towards me.

"What has that to do with you?" he replied, startled at my audacity in daring to attempt to turn the tables.

"I gave you my name without hesitation and even spelt it for you. Surely the tenant has the right to know who her landlord is! I must ask you to give me his name," I insisted.

"His name is Captain So-and-so," he replied.

"And what is his address?" I went on.

"Why do you want to know?" he asked.

"I did not hesitate to give you mine." I replied.

"I have nothing to hide. Has he?"

"All communications to him are sent through us," said he.

"So you refuse his address," I added. "Well,

what is he? I told you who I am. It is only right we should start fair."

"He is a large owner of property," he answered.

"Has he ever seen this house?" I rejoined.

"He never interferes in these matters," he replied shortly. "All his business affairs are dealt with by us."

"I thank you," said I, bowing. "This is very interesting. The gallant Captain, whose address you refuse to give, and who knows nothing of what is being done in his name, is about to throw out one soldier's widow, and another soldier's mother, with sixteen children of soldiers, just because the mother has asked for a room to be cleansed for her soldier son who has won the war. Do you think that the gallant Captain would sanction this if he knew of it? I don't believe he would. Therefore I must ask you to give me his address, as I am going to see him, wherever he may be, and tell him all about it."

"This woman has refused to pay her rent," said he, dodging my insistence.

"I am afraid you have been wrongly informed," I replied. "She has lived in this house for twenty years and never missed payment for a week. Your agent has deliberately refused to collect her rent for the last two months."

"That may be, but she keeps the house in a dirty condition," he went on, beginning to clutch at straws.

"If the house is dirty," I answered back, "it is your dirt, as two of your ceilings have fallen down upon her and nearly smothered her. They are your ceilings, mind, not hers. You know as well as I do that the lessee has neglected the property and you are refusing to put it into repair as legal proceedings

are pending against him. It is not fair to make the tenant suffer because of your dispute. Does the Captain know about this eviction?" I went on, getting back to my former line of argument. "If you won't give me his address, I know where I can soon get it, and he shall be put into possession of all the facts to-day. He has a perfect right to know. I am sure he would not sanction the eviction of eighteen human beings. Just think of it a moment, yourself! Do you like the thoughts of it?"

I could see that I had begun to shake him. But he was not going to give in without a fight, so pulling himself together he thought he would attack me in the rear—in the back pocket.

"How much do you get out of this?" he shouted savagely at me.

"Nothing," I replied smiling, and looking him straight in the eyes, and feeling for the first time really confidently happy, as I knew deep down in my soul that I had beaten him.

"Nothing?" he gasped, and with emphasis, he added, "I don't believe you."

"I can quite believe that," said I quietly and gently. A delightful ecstasy took possession of me. Suddenly I seemed to lose all sense of self. It was as though I had all of a moment been switched on to some superior power, and that our supreme aim was to make Sir John our convert.

"I don't believe it," he repeated, thumping the table. "How do you live?"

"God only knows," I calmly rejoined. "You believe in miracles, do you not? . . . On Sundays, at all events? Well, the age of miracles has not passed. There is something in being fed by ravens after all."

"Do you mean to say you don't charge these people anything? That they don't pay you anything? It's absurd. It's positively absurd. I tell you frankly I don't believe it," and he threw up his head with disgust.

"I can quite believe, Sir John, that you cannot believe that anything can be done in this world except for money," I replied unmoved. "I am not at all surprised. How could it be otherwise? Here are you, a City Magnate, in the very heart of the richest city in the world, looking out of your windows upon the richest bankers in the universe. How could I expect you to think except in terms of money?"

I paused a moment, and he made no reply. I saw that I had defeated the attack in the rear, and seizing my advantage I went on.

"Can you tell me any good thing that has ever been done for money?" I asked. "If a poor person came to you for help in dire distress, would you think of demanding payment for it? Of course you would not. You would scorn such a thought, and would be righteously indignant if it were suggested of you. I can see that you agree with me. In your heart you really did not mean what you said. Yesterday, in all the Churches, there was a call to everyone to concentrate upon reconstruction upon a better and a fairer basis. The papers are full of the sermons this morning. I believe in reconstruction. I am sure that you do, too. And also Captain So-and-so. Then, why not start at once? Here's your very chance. Start by doing up this soldier's bedroom, so that when he lands from France he will be able to say, 'This, at least, is some reward for the

days and nights I have spent with rats and vermin in the trenches. This does show that my efforts have been appreciated, and that my countrymen are in earnest.' A start must be made somewhere. Why should you not make it, by brightening up this dirty little room, in this dirty little street, in this dirty little district? Then extend it to the house, and you will soon want to do the whole street. It only needs a start. Bouquets are always being thrown to the Prince of Wales. The greatest compliment you can pay him is to follow his example. His estate at Kennington has been an eyesore and a byeword for years. But he has doggedly and quietly got down to the work, and now it is one of the best regulated estates in London. He has pointed the way in this as well as in many other things. Why not follow his lead? You never thought that this concerned you, I can see. But you will do something now, will you not? Let me tell this broken-hearted mother that you will gratify her wish by giving her a clean bedroom for her boy. That will be a beginning worthy of you."

Holding his chin in his hand, he allowed me to go on until I stopped. Then he suddenly rose from his chair, and came round to my side of the table and held out his hand.

"Mr. Rider, I am pleased to meet you," he exclaimed. "You are doing a great work. I quite agree with you. Tell me what I am to do about this woman, and I will do anything you wish."

Instructions were at once given that the warrant should be withdrawn, and that the rooms should be repaired.

"One moment," said he, as I was leaving.

“What about the rent? Will you collect that from her and send it to me?”

“No, Sir John,” I replied. “I am not a rent collector. You should collect your own rents and then you would know your tenants. I will send her here to you to-morrow, and you can then make her acquaintance, and tell her that you are making her home comfortable. You will find that this is certain to produce pleasant relations in the future. One thing only I want to ask of you. Sack that agent.”

CHAPTER XXIII

GRATUITY GRABBING

ANOTHER new element now entered into the struggle. Many thousands of the demobilised men, who hitherto had possessed no separate homes, always having lived beneath the parental roof, were now animated with the sole desire to found a home of their own, and to settle down.

Some of these men were engaged to be married when war broke out, others met their future partners in life during the conflict, and many of them had married whilst upon service.

The young wife lived on at her mother's. All her hopes were centred in her husband's return, and her thoughts were engaged in preparing for the home they were to build together when peace was declared.

Every week, you would meet her at the Post Office with her ring paper, drawing her separation allowance, and then you would see her take it further along the counter and deposit it in the Post Office Savings Bank, or purchase War Savings Certificates with it. Early and late you would see her going to or coming from business; there was nothing she could not do, from banking to bus-conducting. We all admired her; we were all in love with her; and we were almost as excited as she was about the new home she was planning.

As soon as her boy returned, they trotted merrily off to the house agent's to get a house, the first essential towards their long looked-for home. Now their troubles commenced. A vulgar guffaw was the

only response to their inquiry for a house to rent, and before they knew where they were they found themselves bound down by a contract, with a mortgage round their necks, and all the money in the bank gone.

What did they get for it? Nothing but a sea of troubles; a house that was the home of a brother soldier and his wife and family, who would not let them in, who would not go out, and who treated them like an enemy.

They would sometimes discover me, at this stage, being full of wrath and indignation that this tenant of theirs should shatter their 'love's young dream.'

When I asked them if they had ever read the Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house," they would say they had not coveted it, they had merely bought it; it had really been forced upon them by necessity, as they were not actually in a position to buy. Upon examination of their contract of purchase I would find that the agent had been astute enough not to sell with immediate, but with future occupation, and therefore they had only bought, for the time being, the right to receive the rent. This was of no good to them, as the inflated price of the house, and the exorbitant mortgage interest with other outgoings, including repairs urgently needed, came to far more than the rent that could be asked.

All their annoyance was directed against the unoffending family living in the house, and it was with difficulty that they could be brought to see that the agent was the cause of their distress. After a time they realised how they had been tricked and they went home again to mother's.



THE MAN WHO ASKED A HOUSE AGENT IF HE HAD
A HOUSE TO LET.

From "Punch," July 16, 1919.

By kind permission of the Proprietors.

Many of them are still with mother; children have come along to complicate rather than to bless the union, and the home that was dreamed of, and worked for so lovingly, is just as far off as ever.

To set ex-Service men to fight each other for their homes immediately upon their return to England, was a smart move on the part of the speculators and the agents. As long as these dealers could sell at a famine price and get the gratuity as a deposit, they did not give a thought to the men's comfort.

It would have been madness to turn families out of homes, when they could not rent others, just because two young people had made a bad bargain. The attempts to destroy such homes were many, and before the end of the year was reached, another amending Act had to be passed to direct the Judges' attention to the fact, that the alternative accommodation offered to the tenant must be reasonable before an order for possession could be made against him.

Any old place, at one time, was thought to be good enough for a tenant who had not enough money to buy a house. All that had to be done was to give the tenant an address of a place, and if he refused it, out he was ordered to go. Only a few Courts would give any consideration to the tenant's objections to the places put forward. I remember at one Court, that several tenants were turned out because they would not accept a cottage miles away upon a lonely heath. This place was constantly being put forward by a firm of agents, and nobody would have it. One day I thought I would go and have a look at it. No wonder it was always refused, the roof was half off and the windows were out, and I

discovered it had a reputation in the district, where it was known as "Alternative Accommodation Cottage." A few weeks later it was mentioned in Court again, and I whispered to the counsel for the tenant to ask the Judge to go and inspect the place. The Judge did so, and was horrified. The cottage must have fallen down after that, as I never heard of it again.

Whenever I heard of alternative accommodation being offered after this, I made it a rule to go and view it, as I knew I should find something extraordinary. In one case I found it to be a house at the end of a cul-de-sac, built right up against a high railway arch, which shut out all the air and light. No one could be got to live in it, it had been unoccupied for years before the war, and when I saw it, there was not a window or door in the place, and the downstairs rooms were full of dirt and rubbish, as they had been turned into a playground by the urchins of the slum.

Upon another occasion, I accompanied a fashionable lady, who was a buyer at a West End establishment, to view some rooms offered to her by the purchaser of her house, at an address near King's Cross Station. When we reached the street, she wanted to turn back, but I insisted that she should go on, as I knew the Judge would not have believed her unless she had been to the house. It was a tenement house, and the windows were stuffed up with rags and brown paper. A dirty old woman came to the door, and as it was opened the stench of the place nearly knocked us backwards, but the old woman also got a shock when we inquired whether any rooms were to let. "There are two rooms to

let, but they wouldn't suit you, lidy," she said, in amazement, wiping her nose with her coarse apron.

Even ex-Service men who attempted to purchase vacant houses received little more consideration. The houses were usually in a terrible state of repair, and the prices asked for them were so high that no mortgagee would lend any money upon them.

Near to me, such a house stood empty for twelve months, and during that time two ex-Service men paid deposits of £25 each. They both of them lost their money as neither of them could find anyone to advance a penny upon the property. Gratuity grabbing became a fine art.

And as though the cauldron was not full enough of trouble, this was the moment selected by the runaways from air raids to rush back and turn out from their former residences, the tenants who had braved the dangers. The houses that these owners were leaving were of no use to their tenants, and what was more, they were for sale. I know several very worthy people, pillars of church and state, who look upon these air raids as visitations from on High, giving them the chance of a country holiday for a year, at no cost to themselves, and putting a hundred pounds or more into their pockets besides. They entirely ignored the home they had wrecked in the course of their speculation.

It may sound strange, yet it is nevertheless true, that the only people about the Courts with any sympathy for these poor people, were the bailiffs. Wherever I went, they would come to me with piles of warrants for eviction in their hands, and ask me when I was going to get Parliament to put a stop to this iniquity. They had to carry out their duties,

but they did not relish them, and to their credit, let it be said, they tried to evade them all they could.

Some of the ex-Service men had still the vivid remembrance of driving off invaders from their trenches with the point of the bayonet, and they were not inclined to submit to being evicted from their homes without a struggle. The bailiff and his men respected this attitude, and they did not see why the landlord should not do his own dirty work himself. Consequently, the County Court Act was altered this year, so that for purposes of executing warrants of possession, it would not be necessary for the bailiffs to remove any goods or chattels from the premises. They had simply to get the key from the tenant, and hand it to the landlord, and then they had washed their hands of the matter.

But the intricacies of the law are simply wonderful. Who would have thought that this simple instruction to relieve bailiffs would swing back and injure the tenant worse than ever?

A widower, whose only son had been killed in the war, lived in a Provincial town with his two servants. An order for possession had been granted against him—unjustly, I consider, but let that pass—and whilst he was out on business, one day, the bailiff arrived, frightened the servants, turned them out of the house, shut the door and made them give him the key of it.

When the householder reached home in the evening, he found the two young girls upon the doorstep, crying. He took his key out of his pocket, opened the door and let them into the house again. Next day, he was served with an injunction to keep away

from the house, but as he and his servants had nowhere else to go, and as all his belongings were in the house, he could not obey it. He was brought before the Court again, and was committed to prison for an indefinite period for contempt of court.

Mr. Daniel Warde, the barrister, followed the Judge about from town to town for a week or more, with affidavits and pleadings for a release of the man or for a definite time to be fixed for his imprisonment. The Judge would not listen to any appeal on the man's behalf. Imprisoned in the County Gaol, and hearing that the Judge would not release him and that the Courts had closed for the vacation, and that the Judge had gone abroad for a holiday and might not be back again for two months, the man resolved to take desperate measures. He thought he might be released if he imitated the suffragettes, and went upon hunger strike. He was released, and released for ever from all his worries, about ten days afterwards, when his body was sent out of prison to his friends for burial.

The situation to me was a nightmare; it was the shipwreck of all one's hopes of a sane reconstruction; it was as though a pack of wolves had been allowed to break through the defences of the sheepfold. The comfortable people, living in their own houses, or being tenants under honourable landlords, with difficulty believed that anything was amiss, and of these the ordinary Member of Parliament was the most difficult to convince. The Protectionist on the one hand seemed to confine his protection to protecting the rich and not the poor, the dealer and not the tenant; whilst the Free Trader, on the other hand, seemed to forget that his free trade could

not swing free and fair until the supply approximated to the demand.

The Civil War for Homes amongst ex-Service men became so serious that it began to attract the attention of those who had the men's interests at heart, and both the late Sir Ernest Cassel and Major David Davies came to our assistance to prevent the homes of the attacked from being destroyed.

Morning after morning, I watched, at one County Court, a prosperous looking agent obtaining as many as ten evictions at a sitting. He would take his timid victim of a purchaser by the hand and go into the witness box with him and develop a powerful story of hardship. When the poor victim of a tenant attempted to say anything about not being able to find another place, the agent would rush in with a statement that the tenant had had first offer of the house and had refused to buy it, and had also refused to look for another one. The Judge appeared to be hypnotised by this agent, and yet the tenant would not have been permitted to have an agent to speak for him. No wonder that this agent boasted of selling five hundred houses a year.

Determined to stop this, I set out to get a mass of information, as Parliament is not interested in injustice as injustice, but only in so far as the mass of it, if not righted, might affect their electoral chances.

I wrote letters to all the important newspapers asking ex-Service men to inform me of what accommodation they had, and what they required. Every paper inserted it, and I did not expect any replies until the next day. But that morning, when I entered the Adelphi, I was struck at seeing this quiet and

retiring thoroughfare crowded with people all the way up the hill. I looked about for traces of a fire, or of a motor accident, but seeing none I proceeded unconcernedly to my office at the window sill.

The proprietor of the premises met me at the door.

"Look here," said he. "You'll have to clear out of here. I can't stand this. These people have been coming to see you ever since eight o'clock this morning. There have been thousands of them."

"I didn't ask them to come," I replied. "I asked them to write to me."

"I can't help that," said he. "I can't have this sort of thing. Nobody can get in or out of the building. I don't mind you, you are all right. But I do object to your followers. And such people, too!"

"They were good enough to fight for you, weren't they?"

"Well, yes . . . I ought not to have said that about them. I withdraw that . . . But you must get away from here, or the whole of the Adelphi will be up in arms."

"I am as surprised as you are," I replied. "I knew there was trouble, but I never thought it was anything like this. You must let me interview them now they are here. I will see if I can hire the bandstand in the Embankment Gardens, as we have outgrown your window sill."

I stood at the window and interviewed all I could that day until late in the evening, and so on, day after day until the torrent of tenants ceased to flow. Then I embodied the results of my investigations in a further letter to the press.

This time, I took precautions to be early at the

office next morning, and it was as well I did, as another stream broke loose upon me. This determination of mine to put a stop to the ex-Service men's grievance, put a stop to my tenancy of the window sill, as the second attack was too much for the patience of the very patient proprietor of the premises.

The weary quest for another office started anew. The agents loved me less than ever.

Was it not about time I stopped this agitation? they would say. They had plenty of houses for sale, and could give me a liberal commission if I would only find them customers. I was like a dog in a manger, I didn't want to make money myself and tried to stop them from making it. I was quite hopeless in their eyes, and my crowd of followers made matters more hopeless still.

Suddenly I thought of Mrs. Cecil Chesterton. She was a woman of generous impulses, and full of bright ideas. What was more, she was the leading spirit in the "Mothers' Defence League," which had been started to protect mothers from the tyrannical plague of officials whose chief delight consisted in inspecting and examining them and their children. Mr. G. K. Chesterton amply filled the position of President of the League, and I was a member of the Committee.

A short time previously, the War Rents League had defended one of their mothers in a possession case. She had seven children, and she was a clean, hard-working little woman. The bane of her existence was a swarm of rats and bugs that infested the house into which she had been removed as alternative accommodation. She had notified the Sanitary

Authority, who had given orders for the house to be stripped and cleansed. The agent now asked the Court to turn the woman out alleging that she had brought the bugs with her. He owned to the rats being his, but would not recognise the vermin. Our appeal to the Judge not to turn out the babies, but to support the Sanitary Inspector in turning out the bugs was of no avail. In the interests of humanity and house owners, he ordered the expulsion of the babies.

Upon a legal point an appeal was entered, and as the agents were advised they had no case, they gave way and found the woman and her babies another house.

Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, therefore, was well acquainted with the work we were doing, and above all, her sympathies were Catholic. From Catholics I have always received the greatest kindness, and been given the most willing assistance. They look upon the family as a unit, and upon home and home-life as sacred. Their philosophy, education and treatment of economic questions were inspired by ethical claims with the home as the foundation. This was the antithesis of the selfish spirit that prevailed around. It was no wonder, therefore, that priests, nuns, sisters, and members of the Catholic community looked kindly upon our efforts and blessed our work.

So it came about that Mrs. Cecil Chesterton granted me the use of a room at No. 3, Fleet Street, opposite the High Courts of Justice, and looking down the main avenue of the Temple.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCILIATION

THE removal to the Street of Adventure gave me an opportunity of developing a policy of conciliation which I had found to answer in many instances where it had been tried.

The successes achieved at the last moment, of which I have already given a few illustrations, suggested that an experiment upon a larger scale might be equally successful if undertaken before disputes culminated in legal proceedings. The Property Owners' Association had shown goodwill in discussing with me settlements of difficulties between members and their tenants, and arrangements were easily arrived at with them, as the Association embodied the cream of the property owners. But there was more skim outside the Association than there was cream within it, and to attempt to reason with those speculators, who were property owners to-day and bookmakers or rag and bone merchants to-morrow, bordered upon the quixotic. As long as the law was strongly on the side of the tenant, it was possible to curb these gamblers. For as soon as they found they were caught, and that the appeal to the law would go against them, the wisest of them made the best terms possible. If they bluffed all the way into Court, they were beaten, and they lost more on their speculation. Invariably they would come and tell me they regretted they did not accept my advice; they had been led away by some solicitor who knew nothing about the Rent Act.

My experience is that the tenants who came to me were, with few exceptions, most reasonable people. They would agree to any workable compromise that I would suggest. Many of them were far too reasonable; in order to avoid trouble they would give up parts of their tenancies and consent to all kinds of alterations too readily, only to discover later that the landlord treated this desire for peace as a weakness, and used it as a means to force further concessions to their detriment.

Much tact and patience was required to make the wolf lie down with the lamb, and so long as the Rent Act was on the side of the lamb, the wolf could only growl and show his teeth, but could not bite.

This was delicate and amusing work. It was like playing several hundred games of chess at once, always waiting for your opponents's next move, and then giving him another move to make.

If I had written to the landlord, his solicitor or agent at the outset, I should very likely have received a reply saying that I was "Nobody," which was perfectly true, or I should have been politely told "to go to the Devil," which would have been superfluous, as I was at his throat every day. If I had openly played the chess men I should have defeated my object. I therefore composed letters for the tenant to copy out, and constructed them in his own language, as far as possible, so as to allay suspicions that he was being assisted. These nearly always were answered by false and flashy moves, drawing bluffing and threatening replies, and containing statements and admissions which were of value to us. After this correspondence had gone on for some time, I would get the tenant to suggest that

the landlord met him with a friend, my anonymous self, to discuss a settlement, or else I would take an open hand in the game, saying that the tenant had handed his letters to me and I thought that if he would meet me we might arrange matters in a friendly way. If he were wise he saw me and came to a settlement, for the game had by then reached that stage when he could not fail to lose.

After a time, these speculators and their agents began to think that my conciliatory policy was a confession of weakness, but after a few smashing defeats in cases where they refused to settle, they thought twice before declining to come to terms.

Sometimes the landlord would take my letter to his solicitor, and then the fat would be in the fire. The solicitor would tell me to mind my own business, and I would send the retort courteous that he had better learn his.

Nobody resented my gratuitous help to tenants more than those solicitors who thought that the Rent Act was passed for their special pecuniary benefit. Attempts were made to prejudice us in the eyes of the Judges, by allegations either that I was acting as a solicitor, or that I had contaminated the tenant and caused the trouble with his landlord; but they all failed.

I do not know why these men should have been jealous of me, excepting that I gave accurate information and sound advice, when they did neither. I had no desire to be a solicitor, nor to act as one. If they had received a proper classical education they would have known that "Dan" means "A Judge." And it was from this judicial point of view that I always approached every case brought to my

notice. I wanted to see fair play, and not to force the letter of the law on either side. Many of the best firms of solicitors recognised this, and they would frequently send the facts of disputes to me and ask for my opinion upon them, and borrow reports of special cases and report to me the results of cases they had conducted that had special points of interest. In this way I gradually formed a list of reliable solicitors throughout England, so that I could with confidence direct any poor tenant to one, who was conversant with this legislation, in his own town.

Anything in the nature of conciliation, arbitration or rent courts, where the intervention of a solicitor was not necessary, was not viewed kindly by this branch of the legal profession. As soon as I started to prevent litigation, it became a common practice to misrepresent me by trying to lead the Court to believe that my interference had prevented a settlement of the dispute.

I well remember a case at Wandsworth, that was brought before Judge Harington. It concerned a woman with four children whose husband was in the Army. Her landlady wanted to remove from the rooms in which she was living over her shop, in order to sell the house and business, and she said she desired to turn the soldier's wife out of the rooms she occupied to come into them. The landlady had worried the tenant so much that she had a nervous breakdown, and had to seek the advice of a doctor. After several visits to him, he said her progress was most unsatisfactory, and she must have something on her mind that was distressing her and retarding her recovery. She told him of her worry, and he

advised her to come and see me, saying that he found me the best nerve doctor for this kind of complaint, as I had completely cured two other patients of his.

I found the woman to be a nervous wreck, too ill to do anything for herself, and dreading above everything a summons to the Court. I felt that I must act in a dual capacity in this case, both as judge and doctor. I relieved her of all responsibility by taking everything into my hands. I went and viewed the house in which she lived, and found that there was ample room for the landlady to live there as well as her tenant. I also had a look at the landlady's shop, and I was directed by her personally, as a possible buyer, although she did not know who I was, to her agent. He gave me a written statement of the price of the house and the conditions of the lease, and I also got from him an offer of the house in which my woman lived, as that was to be sold when she had been turned out of her rooms. Having these facts in my possession, I wrote the landlady a polite letter stating that I had heard she was worrying her tenant to get out, and making her ill, and that I was determined to put a stop to such persecution. I suggested that if she really desired to live in that house, the matter could be easily arranged, if she would make an appointment to meet me and her tenant.

The landlady went to a solicitor immediately and he issued a summons. When we appeared in Court, her solicitor opened his case by stating that this action would never have been brought but for the pernicious interference of an organisation calling itself the War Rents League, which was doing nothing but foment

strife between landlord and tenant, and had advised this particular tenant not to meet her landlady's wishes and remove from the house. To prove his statement, he read my letter to the landlady, and I was surprised to hear how well it sounded in Court. Judge Harington asked for it to be handed to him, and he carefully re-read it. Then turning to the solicitor he said, in his quiet and self-possessed way, that it was in his opinion a very proper letter, and from the remarks the solicitor had made, he thought this was essentially a case for settlement; therefore he would adjourn the hearing so that there might be an opportunity of carrying out the suggestion made by the War Rents League.

It sometimes happened that the tenant was in the wrong or had been misled, and then a courteous apology speedily healed the misunderstanding with the landlord.

Many landlords who wished to do the straight thing would come and lay their troubles before me. This, at first, led to some misunderstanding, as accusations were levelled at me that I was acting for both sides, until I made it quite clear that I was taking no sides at all, merely striving to obtain fair play for both.

A spiteful landlord or tenant would now and again ask me to assist him in taking his revenge upon his opponent, and then I had the great delight of showing him the door.

This policy of conciliation has been so much appreciated by those who desired to act decently, that as far as I can estimate, as many as 12,000 cases have been settled by the War Rents League in this way.

One of the most acceptable compliments the

League has been paid, was a summons to the offices of the "Daily News and Star," to be told by Mr. R. S. Pengelly that the Editor of those papers had wished him to say that never before had he received so many letters of thanks and appreciation from contending parties, as in connection with our work, from both landlords and tenants.

In South Wales, Mr. Mardy Jones was pursuing the same policy by forming tribunals of landlords and tenants to come to amicable arrangements rather than air their differences in the Courts, and in several parts of the country the Labour Party adopted and encouraged a similar course.

Our great difficulty was that the Courts would not give sanction to the agreements arrived at; consequently we were always exposed to either party backing out of them.

Whilst the "Daily Herald" was largely controlled by Mr. George Lansbury and Mr. Francis Meynell, I wrote a daily article for it upon the Rent Act, but when the management passed into other hands, I was informed that conciliation was not their policy, so my connection with the paper ceased.

In February, 1920, Dr. Addison set up another Committee to advise what steps should be taken to extend, continue, or amend the Act. This was presided over by the Marquess of Salisbury, and included Sir Edward Bray, Mr. E. Hallas, M.P., Sir Aubery Symonds, K.C.B., and Mr. P. B. Moodie.

This was one of the most valuable committees in connection with this legislation that has ever sat. Although about thirty witnesses were examined orally, among whom I was included, the report was issued the following month. It recommended that

the Act should be extended still further to houses of £105 rateable value in London, £90 in Scotland, and £78 elsewhere, and that it should be continued for a further period of three years. It allowed the standard rent to be increased by 40 per cent. of the net rent, to cover extra cost of repairs, and increased mortgage interest, and it laid down provisions for the protection of the tenant if the repairs were not done. Owing to the presence of Sir Edward Bray upon this Committee, many improvements of a technical nature were suggested in connection with the Act and its administration, which were necessary and useful, and if all of them had been adopted by the Government in framing the new Act, many bitter grievances would have been avoided.

The Rent Act of 1920 was framed upon these recommendations, and although it did not contain all it might have done, and included as usual some unworkable clauses, yet, taken on the whole, it was the best Act that had hitherto been passed.

The one great thing was that it strengthened the clause in reference to alternative accommodation, making this a condition precedent before any landlord could obtain possession of the house for himself, his family or workpeople. This was the great safeguard for the tenant, who was now secure of his home until another could be found for him, reasonably equivalent as regards rent and suitability in all respects.

This clause was the result of five years' hard fighting. At last were the Courts bound down to a definition from which they could not escape. It stopped slum houses from being offered to respectable tenants. It protected the tenant against both

new and old speculators, and placed him upon an equality for bargaining with them.

But the Act was full of qualifying clauses which were inserted to meet special cases of hardship, and to these the speculators turned at once, adroitly adapting their cases to come within these exceptions so as to escape having to find the tenant another house. For the next three years there was a constant fight against these tricksters, who spared no expense in making loopholes all over the Act, and we were kept busy in looping the loopholes, so that unsuspecting tenants should not step into them.

Instead of the measure being simplified so that every householder could understand it, it was more complicated than ever, and the cartoonist of the "Daily Express" had a brain wave when he depicted it in the form of a maze.

To simplify the Act was one of the most difficult tasks I have ever undertaken, but with the valuable assistance of Mr. Chattaway of "The Star," a useful booklet was produced, that was issued by "The Daily News," and has been of service to thousands.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. SECTION 8

UNEMPLOYMENT now showed itself as a menacing factor in our housing worries. More than two million people were unable to find work, and the greater number of these were householders and heads of families. The dole was but a temporary expedient, and could not be relied upon to keep the home going for long; and the prospect was uninviting.

"Now the new Act is passed," said a confiding landlord to me, "I intend to make my tenants pay their own rates."

"You cannot alter the terms of their tenancy so as to make it less favourable to them," I replied, "and this certainly would do so. And what is more, as they have always paid an inclusive rental, you cannot change that condition without their consent. It is far better and easier for these tenants to pay every week an amount that meets all charges as they have always done. Why do you want to make the change now?"

"I have been considering the matter with several landlords," said he, "and we have come to the conclusion, that owing to the serious unemployment, it will be impossible for the tenants to pay the thirty or forty per cent. increase of rent we are allowed to put on, together with the huge increase in the rates. Therefore, as we are entitled to our increase, according to the Act, and we can enforce it, we intend to

get it, and to minimise the risk of losing it. If we increase the net rent by thirty per cent. the tenant will pay us every week the same amount as he pays now. That sum includes the rates, but in future we intend that the tenant shall pay all the rates in addition to his payment to us. The Local Authority will have to collect these rates from him, and we shall place the responsibility for them upon his shoulders. He can easily pay the amount we are asking him to pay us, so that we shall stand to lose nothing, and we shall make sure of our former net return together with the increases."

This was a plain business statement showing that some owners were prepared to strain the Act to its limits, and even beyond. Without a thought of how this would affect their tenants, the rating authority, or the interests of the country generally, they were calculating how to pull through with an enhanced profit to themselves, and if possible to throw over their former obligations. Owners' Organisations did not officially encourage this line of action, although they did not go out of their way to discountenance it.

Before long, simple-minded tenants began to chant to me in praise of the generosity of their landlords.

"Would you believe it?" they would say. "Our landlord has reduced our rent by two shillings a week Just fancy, two shillings! We offered him our eleven shillings as usual, and he handed us back two shillings, telling us he did not want more than nine shillings in future."

"What reason did he give you for this unheard of reduction? Are you sure he is quite all there?"

"Oh, yes. He was more pleasant than ever we

have known him. He says the rents are lowered."

It required quite an amount of persuasion to make them send him back the two shillings he had refused, and to tender the full rent in future. It pained me to have to disillusion them. But the justification for my advice was not long in coming; as soon as the rating officials had time to make out the demands for the new rates, they all had one for five pounds, being the amount for the half year, with the startling announcement that it was payable at once.

Thousands of tenants were deluded into thinking that their rents were actually reduced, and they got into many difficulties with the rate collectors, through the change that had been forced upon them without their knowledge or consent. Unless they immediately repudiated any change in their tenancy, the Courts held that they had consented to the alteration by paying the lower rental.

Some less scrupulous landlords even turned the rates upon the tenants and made no reduction at all.

To combat this shifting of responsibility was difficult with ignorant tenants, who had not the faintest knowledge of rating laws and regulations. The simplest way was for the tenant to refuse to pay any but the usual rent, and if that were refused to put it aside, and when enough had been accumulated to meet the rate demand, to pay that with the rent in hand, and then to tender the landlord the receipt as being equivalent to the payment of so much rent. They had paid the landlord's debt to the Council and were obtaining credit for it. When he saw he was defeated, he soon took his usual rent again, and rating authorities were delighted as they had never had these rates paid so quickly before.

Unemployment and sickness caused many people to break into this uncollected rent, and then tragedies occurred.

Middle-class people, who had always paid their rates direct, could not understand why their poorer brethren should not do the same. They held a theory that by the direct payment of rates, the householder was more inclined to realise his responsibilities as a local elector, and might in this way be encouraged to take more interest in local economies.

Before the war, municipal reformers had a policy that all rates should be paid direct, and not indirectly in the rent, but the landlords had always been in opposition to this. Finding that the landlord had altered his opinion, these theorists thought they had converted him, and were eager to put their accepted theories into practice.

They forgot that conditions had been considerably altered by the war, and that "time makes ancient good uncouth." Before the war, the majority of tenants were in regular work, and they might have been able to get together a lump sum to pay for rates. Even then, the sum that would have had to be found was only half of what it was to-day, and those tenants who felt it a burden would have been able to find many an empty house into which they could have removed at an inclusive rental. With chronic unemployment, double rates, and no houses to let, no time could have been worse for making such an experiment.

Reformers had some justification before the passing of the Rent Acts for asking for the change, as the continual rise and fall in the rates were used

as an election trick. An outgoing council, in order to curry favour with the electors, would reduce the rates, say by fourpence in the pound, during their last year of office. As soon as the new council was elected, no matter what party was returned, the rate had to be increased by twopence as the reduction had led to a deficit, with the inevitable overdraft at the bank to meet necessary expenditure. Immediately the twopenny rate was put on, the rents of the inclusive houses would be increased by threepence a week, showing a handsome profit of about 400 per cent. on the increase, for the landlord. Next year another twopence would be added to the rate to balance matters, and another threepence a week would go upon the rents. The following year as another election was coming round again, the fourpence would be taken off the rate once more making it what it was three years before, but nothing whatever would come off the rents. And in this way the landlord used every excuse to increase, but he would never reduce. In an investigation into rent and rates in the South of London some years ago, I found that over a period of twenty years, the rate had in spite of ups and downs remained stationary, whilst the rent had doubled. So, to secure to the tenants the benefit of the decrease in the rates, reformers had then thought it better for them to pay their own rates direct, but the landlords had fought for the system as it was, as they did well out of it.

The situation now had changed, as the Rent Act only enabled the landlord to increase the rent by the exact amount of the increase of the rates, and when the rates decreased the tenant was to receive

the benefit of the reduction. Therefore part of the theorist's case was met, although he could not see it, but the owner saw it at once, and said, so long as he could not get any profit out of the rates, he did not see why he should take the trouble to collect and be responsible for them.

An attempt was made in some quarters, encouraged by dead-letter lawyers, to twist the meaning of the Act so that no reduction should be made in the rent when the rates fell. Unfortunately for them the first endeavour to snap a judgment in their favour was made before Judge Parry, who gave them no quarter.

"Do you mean to tell me," said the Judge, "that you are going to argue seriously that because the rates fall you should not reduce the rent?"

"That is my argument, your Honour," replied the counsel; "I admit it may be hard upon the tenant not to do so, but"

"Hard upon the tenant? It's more than that, it is dishonest," quickly retorted the Judge.

"If your Honour will look at Section 2, subsection 1, paragraph (b), you will see that no mention is made there of" continued the counsel.

"I know all about the law on the matter," said the Judge. "There's too much law in connection with these cases. What you want is the Commandments."

Turning to the Registrar, the Judge said, "You know more about the Commandments than I do, Mr. Registrar. What is the number of the Commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal'?" to which he replied "Number eight."

"There you are," said His Honour to the counsel,

“That is the reference you require. The Ten Commandments, Section 8. Case dismissed with costs. I won’t have the time of the Court wasted with such rubbish.”

But the pedants were not satisfied, so they took a case to the Divisional Court, and got a judgment in their favour, which was subsequently squashed completely by the Court of Appeal. Here again, the organised property-owners were on the side of fair play, and petitioned the Government to make it certain that the rents should be reduced as rates went down, but their ragged army of camp followers got every halfpenny they could, whilst any doubt existed.

The greatest objection we had to the rates being turned upon the tenants was that it changed their tenancies to their detriment, and cast upon them a burden that they did not formerly have to bear. Many tenants, owing to their lack of employment, and their ineligibility for the dole, were obliged to seek relief from the Guardians to enable them to pay their landlord. If the rent included rates, the Guardians would grant them the full amount, but if it did not include them, the amount of the rent only could be given.

In this way numbers of families found themselves deprived of assistance to meet the rate demands, and were exposed to grave injustice and indignity in consequence.

By transforming a part of the rent into a debt for rates, this part for rates became a criminal and not a civil debt, as proceedings for its recovery might end in imprisonment.

This is actually what did take place, as numbers

of men and women occupiers were sent to Brixton and Holloway Prisons for periods of three weeks, because they could not pay, and they had not sufficient goods and chattels to satisfy a distress.

Islington was one of the worst offending boroughs in this respect. The irony of the situation was that Islington had a Labour Council and a Labour Mayor, and yet these refused to take any steps to stop this scandal. The families of these out-of-work labourers and ex-service men would have starved during their imprisonment but for the kindness of their equally distressed neighbours. When I appealed to the Mayor to have the rates excused on the ground of poverty, he could only reply that he was advised that this could not be done, whereas whenever I made a similar request to a Borough like Kensington, every help and assistance was forthcoming to excuse the unfortunate ratepayer.

CHAPTER XXVI

TRANSFER OF RATES TO TENANTS

To make matters worse at this moment, when occupiers were being disturbed by demands for rates, some local councils thought fit to increase assessments and to make a drastic alteration in the rating of the lowest rented houses.

An increase in the assessment meant an increase of the amount of rates payable, which could be claimed from the tenant, and as there was not a general re-valuation of the district, striking anomalies were created; houses of the same pre-war rentals in the same street being called upon to pay different amounts of rates.

The worst change, however, was the abolition in certain districts of the compounding system, which adversely affected the poorest tenants. Under this system, landlords could contract with local authorities, or local authorities could force them to contract, to make themselves responsible for all rates levied upon their houses, if in London the rateable value did not exceed twenty pounds a year, in Liverpool thirteen pounds, in Manchester and Birmingham ten pounds, and in other places eight pounds. In consideration of this agreement to compound the payment of rates, the landlords were granted an allowance of from fifteen to thirty per cent. of the amount of the rates, to compensate them for the rates on any houses that might fall empty, and also for the cost of collection.

This was regulated by the Poor Rate Assessment and Collection Act, 1869, which also provided that where the landlord failed to pay the rates, they could be paid by the tenant and deducted from his rent. This Act was passed to meet the difficulty caused by the Representation of the People Act, 1867, which extended the franchise to rated occupiers and lodgers paying more than ten pounds a year rent, by repealing the Small Tenements Rating Act, 1850, so far as this applied to the rating of owners, making the direct payment of rates by the occupier a necessary part of his qualification as a voter.

The distress resulting from this alteration in rating was soon apparent to Parliament by the large number of petitions presented from the East End of London, from Birmingham and all the large towns.

Mr. Holm, at that time member for Hackney, in support of the rating of owners, said in the debate in the Commons, "The simple mode of making the landlord pay the rate collector for the overseers fulfilled one of the three important canons of taxation laid down by Adam Smith. All rates ought to be collected at the time and in the manner in which it was most convenient for the occupier to pay them. It was well known that in cases of domestic calamity it was often impossible for the poorer occupiers to pay at all."

John Bright, the Member for Birmingham, was also a strong advocate for reverting to the former system. "There were 36,000 householders in that borough," he said, "whose rates were paid regularly and universally by the owners of the houses and without a single person there asking this House to make a change, the House swept away the whole

system, and brought upon 36,000 householders, some of whom were women, without claim to the franchise, an absolutely new tax. We know what local rates are, they are very heavy taxes, which come with great severity and hardship upon those who are least able to pay them. I need not describe the summonses, the warrants of distress, the disturbances, and the rioting almost, and the misery occasioned by the change."

Yet, in spite of this historical instance, at a time when labour conditions were worse than they had ever been, and rates were higher than had ever been known, some councils, and especially those where Labour predominated, wiped out the compounding allowances. In Stepney, Southwark and Sheffield, all districts where poverty was excessive, the poorest occupier was asked to pay twenty-five to sixty-six per cent. more rates in proportion than any other householder. And the same demand was made in other towns throughout the country.

Sheffield was the outstanding example of this change of policy. Here it was thought that £25,000 a year could be saved to the rates by discontinuing the compounding allowances. The owners were in favour of it as they saw a chance of shifting a burden upon the tenants, and the Labour members of the City Council were infatuated by their theory of direct rating. All the experienced officials of the Council were opposed to it, as they saw the impossibility of collecting the rate.

No sooner was the change made, than the extremists in the City saw their opportunity. There was unprecedented unemployment, and the majority of the poorer occupiers were existing upon the dole, so

that unless the rent and rates were collected together every week, there was no chance of getting any payment for rates in a lump sum.

Matters came to a head when the City Council issued 10,000 summonses for non-payment of rates, and there was the possibility of warrants for distraint and imprisonment following. The extremists were delighted with the situation, and were determined that nothing should be done to prevent them from launching their much-talked-of revolution.

But they reckoned without taking into account the "Tenants' Defence Association," a little body of earnest men and women in the district, who were working to alleviate difficulties, and who had for their president, Mrs. Simpson, a remarkable woman, who had never taken part in public work before, but who was the embodiment of tact and common-sense. To Mrs. Simpson and her husband, I consider that Sheffield owes a debt of gratitude for having saved it from riots and bloodshed, at this time.

I was invited to visit Sheffield to investigate the position on behalf of the Tenants' Defence Association, and I found that it was almost impossible at first to address any open air meetings, as we were subjected to continuous disturbances from the unruly element whose one great cry was "Burn down the Town Hall." Every appeal to protect the people's homes was met by shouts of "We want them to evict us. The more evictions the merrier." Every proposal to meet the matter in a reasonable way was scorned. Trade Union officials of long experience found themselves helpless as their unions were becoming honeycombed with men who were seeking trouble.

As the day for the hearing of the summonses approached, the danger of a disturbance became more assured.

A meeting was called at the largest cinema in the City, and I was asked to address it. It was attended by people to whom summonses had been given. The extremists were represented, and they opened the meeting with some fiery speeches from the platform. Direct rating was going to be met by direct action, to judge by the approval of these speeches by the vast audience. I set myself the task of cooling down the feelings of the tenants who were being threatened, and I appealed to them to stay their hand until the Tenants' Defence Association had time to approach the authorities on their behalf. Their president, Mrs. Simpson, had thought out a plan whereby she could organise those who had to attend at the Police Court, and she asked them to meet her at the Labour Hall and bring their summonses to her and give her all details about their circumstances.

The next morning I took train to Nottingham and had an interview with Mr. A. W. Shelton, the President of the Federation of Property Owners, whose assistance I had found before to be most valuable. I urged him to come back to Sheffield with me and use his influence with the property owners there, to come to some agreement with the Tenants' Defence Association so as to prevent a calamity. He was unable to leave Nottingham, but he telephoned to Sheffield, and also gave me letters of introduction to Mr. Morrison and Mr. Smith, who acted for the owners in that City. That evening Mrs. Simpson and I interviewed them, and we all arranged to meet at the Town Hall next morning.

There we were courteously received by the Assistant Overseer, and arrangements were made that time should be given the tenants to pay, and that no orders for distraint or for imprisonment should be granted.

At the Police Court, the tenants were lined up in order outside, and the riotous element was kept back by the police. They were admitted in batches of forty at a time with Mrs. Simpson at their head, she having their summonses with her, and their cases were adjourned.

The property owners had had a shock. They could see to what their policy had nearly led. But it was difficult to get the Labour representatives upon the City Council to make any move to revert to the former system. At last it began to dawn upon them that the City Treasurer had never had any of the £25,000 allowance, that it was thought to save by doing away with the compounding, and that for the first time this amount was being collected from the rates the poorest tenants had to pay. Whilst the rates of other householders had been increased by 100 per cent., those of the poor had been increased by 166 per cent., and they were supposed to make a present of £25,000 to the City funds.

Attempts were made to collect the rates by instalments of ten shillings a week at first, then of five shillings, then two shillings and sixpence, and at last Sheffield was glad to get it in any sums, no matter how small. But the distress has been so great, and the difficulty of collecting so enormous, that a report has just been issued by the City Council showing that the arrears in the rates amount to £522,687,

all of which would have been paid if compounding had been in operation.

Nobody has benefited by this change. The tenants have been perpetually worried, the City's finances have suffered, and the landlords have nothing to congratulate themselves upon.

This has been the experience in other parts of the country, even in those towns where special stamps were issued for the tenant to purchase and stick upon forms which would be accepted by the rating authorities. Most of our troubles have been caused because people would not let well alone during these abnormal times.

CHAPTER XXVII

TAKING HOUSES OUT OF THE ACT

Now that alternative accommodation reasonably equivalent and suitable was made a condition precedent to an order for possession, speculators turned their attention to other parts of the Act to see if they could break through anywhere and thus continue to defeat this legislation.

A common device was to alter the letting so as to take it outside the Act.

Rooms and houses, that had formerly been let as residences, were now only to let as business premises, the Act allowing sixty per cent. increase to be made upon their rents, as Lord Salisbury's Committee had naively reported that this increase would not affect business men, because they could get it out of their clients and customers.

For one year, business premises were under the control of the Act, and although a special Committee sat to consider its extension and issued a report recommending further control under a Rent Tribunal, the Government refused to move.

Thousands of ex-service men, who had taken lock-up shops and workrooms, and started to build up businesses with their war gratuities, were at once exposed to ruin by the withdrawal of protection and the demand for exorbitant rents and premiums. Business men who had experienced a hard struggle to keep their heads above water during the war were now ruthlessly wiped out by the crushing rents that

were being imposed upon them under threat of losing their goodwill. Provincial war profiteers came flocking into London prepared to pay anything for the sake of a London office address. Big business everywhere saw its chance of snuffing out its little rivals by purchasing their premises over their heads, closing them up and absorbing their trade.

Tenants of houses near business centres also became bitten by the same desire to profiteer under cover of their own protection against their landlords.

Rooms and flats that hitherto had been living rooms were now diverted for use as offices and store rooms. Several large blocks of middle-class flats were taken out of habitation entirely, thus causing the shortage to be greater, and the pressure upon existing dwelling accommodation to be worse.

Agents engaged in this new form of speculation sprang up like mushrooms everywhere. In one West End district alone, where before the war there had only been eleven agents, there were now two hundred.

The influx of these gamblers was so great that it eventually began to alarm estate agents, who have sought a charter in order to protect their profession from being at the mercy of such birds of prey.

Another favourite method was to say that rooms were let with use of furniture, so as to take them outside all control. There was a clause for the adjustment of the rents of furnished lettings, but it never worked because the tenant had no security; there was nothing to prevent the tenant being ejected and the rooms being let for the same rent or more to the next comer.

No professional landlady of any experience could miss such a wonderful chance. With an old bedstead,

its broken lathes held together with string, a rickety chair, a cracked jug and wash basin and a common mirror, one old lady of my acquaintance furnished eight rooms in her house and let them at a profit of seven pounds a week. The applicant was told he must take the rooms furnished as above, and was given a rent book to that effect. As soon as he got in he turned the things out for his own. They were then used to "furnish" another room, and so on, until every room in the house had been "furnished" with them.

After a time, even this odd lot of rubbish was found by some interpreters of the Act to be more than was required to furnish a room. One Judge held that a small piece of linoleum upon a bath room floor furnished the whole of a flat. It was not until after an expenditure of much time and money that the Court of Appeal laughed this contention out of Court, by asking the counsel for the landlord what he would say if he took a furnished house for his wife and found only a piece of oil cloth in one room; this might be enough furniture for an Arab, but as this Act was passed for the British, and furniture was a collective word meaning more than one item, it was not reasonable to say this place was furnished.

And yet I listened for two hours in a Court one day to the argument of a counsel that there was a latent ambiguity in an agreement for a flat at an inclusive rental, his contention being that the word "inclusive" meant that the tenant was paying for the use of carpets on the stairs and a towel rail in the bath room. This however was too much for the Judge, who, after patiently listening to long

readings of law cases, told him that "inclusive" had a well-recognised meaning amongst all landlords and tenants, as it meant that the rates were included with the payment of rent, and what was more the very agreement he wished to say was ambiguous was very definite upon one point, namely that the rooms let were described as unfurnished. This is but one instance of what tenants had to defend themselves against, and shows the lengths to which landlords would go in order to try to take their rooms outside the Act.

Another trick was to say that rooms were let with attendance. This was pursued with much vigour by companies who owned blocks of flats. Although they had increased their tenants' rents by the forty per cent., thus admitting that they thought they came within the Act, they woke up suddenly one day to the fact that they had a caretaker living in a basement in one of the blocks, and that he lighted the gas on the stairs and swept the common stairway. Again some interpreters played into their hands, and for a considerable time the tenants of such places were subjected to harsh treatment. If such a reading of the law had held, there is no block of workmen's dwellings that would not have been outside protection. I know of a block of flats that changed hands, where the purchaser acting upon this supposition at once tried to frighten the tenants to sign agreements at two and a half times their rent for twenty years. Some were foolish enough to do so, but the majority sought advice and refused. The speculator was annoyed. He confessed that if he could have got these agreements signed, he would then have been able to sell the whole block with a guaranteed income

for twenty years, and come out of the deal with a huge profit.

Any house that after April 2nd, 1919, was *bonâ fide* reconstructed by way of conversion into two or more separate and self-contained flats or tenements was granted an immunity from control. These words of the Act seem definite enough to convey to anybody that a serious reconstruction is intended, and that a flat or tenement shall contain within itself everything that is essential for domestic convenience of the occupants. And yet, nearly every word in the clause has been so whittled down in the process of interpretation, that it is almost impossible to say what constitutes a reconstruction or renders rooms self-contained. The bath and lavatory may be floors away from the rooms in question, and may have to be shared with other occupants of the house; yet, by some mysterious process of reasoning Judges have defined such a letting as separate and self-contained.

A few boards of skirting and a door shutting off a staircase, costing at the most five pounds, is considered all that is necessary to reconstruct by way of conversion, so as to enable the owner to obtain five pounds a week more rent for his house than he formerly received. The addition of a sink in the corner of a top back room has been held to convert all the other floors, as well as that, into separate and self-contained flats. And the bolting of a door at the head of the basement stairs has taken all the rooms in the house outside the Act. After such judgments as these it is no wonder that tenants have begun to believe that the words "*bonâ fide*" have no meaning in the English language.

Decisions supporting such obvious evasions of the

Act were utilised to their full in the interests of the petty profiteer, and they did not assist those of us who had a respect for law and order in our attempts to restrain those turbulent spirits among the tenants who were eager to retaliate.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NUISANCE AND ANNOYANCE

As owners were determined that no vacant houses should be let again, but kept empty until they were sold; and also that when a tenant vacated a house and left behind a sub-tenant (who was protected by the Act) in a part of the premises, the empty rooms should not be let, but the house sold with part possession; alternative accommodation was not available anywhere, for it had been withdrawn from the letting market. The security for the tenant was therefore complete, and the sale of tenanted houses began to fall off as the chances of obtaining possession diminished.

This inevitably led to a differentiation in price in the speculative market. For immediate possession four times, for part possession three times, and for future possession twice the pre-war cost of houses was being demanded.

This gave a good opportunity for a flutter. A purchaser of a tenanted house stood to make as much again as he had paid if he could get the tenant out of the whole house, and half as much again if he could get the sub-tenant out of the part.

Something had to be done to stimulate the sale of these houses, more especially as some of them would have to be repaired very soon, and the owners wanted to leave that expense to the purchaser.

A minute study was therefore directed to other parts of the Act to see if possession could not be obtained without having to find other accommoda-

tion. Undesirable tenants, those who through their misconduct were a nuisance and annoyance to neighbouring occupiers, could not expect to receive any consideration in this way. If they were turned adrift, they had only themselves to blame, they had got what they had asked for. But it could not be supposed that any tenant knowing the difficulty of finding another home, would wilfully make himself a nuisance or annoyance, so as to be turned into the street.

Recognising this, the speculator set himself at first to invent nuisances, and later on to provoke annoyances, in order to work up a case upon these grounds.

Nothing was more difficult to fight than these allegations, for they were sprung upon tenants in the Court, where often they were dumbfounded as they heard them for the first time. It would have been thought that notice would have been required of the ground upon which applications for possession were being asked, so that tenants could have a chance of defending themselves. But as there was no definite instruction to this effect in the Act, the Courts allowed all kinds of allegations to be brought forward, and in many cases encouraged the landlords by asking them if their tenants had not been an annoyance, and then condemning the tenants because they had no rebutting evidence. Judge Parry, after years of experience of every possible and impossible form of nuisance and annoyance that could be invented, alone among Judges had a notice displayed in his Courts that he would not hear any such case unless the defendant had been notified with particulars.

The patter of little children's feet, the sounds of

them at play, the movement from one room to another, an occasional tune upon a piano or a gramophone were all magnified beneath the microscope of Mammon.

One young lady was awakened at six one morning, to get ready to be taken to the seaside for a holiday, and she sat up in bed and sang a song of joy. When she returned from the sea, she found her parents were summoned to give up their rooms because she had created an annoyance with her song.

Before Judge Parry, a landlord complained that his tenant got up at half past five in the morning.

"What time does he go to bed?" asked the Judge.

"At nine o'clock."

"Well," said the Judge, "what have you to complain about? Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

"But he runs up and down the stairs."

"Very good exercise, too," commented the Judge.

"But he has heavy hob-nailed boots on," added the landlord.

"How long has he worn those?"

"The last six months," replied the landlord.

"What did he wear before then, for the eight years he has lived with you?"

"Carpet slippers," was the reply.

"I thought so," said Judge Parry. "Immediately he discovers you charge him too much rent, he distresses himself by wearing hob-nailed boots. What an extraordinary influence the Rent Act has upon people! It makes them throw their slippers away and take to hob-nails."

Then there were complaints because the lodgers

were night workers. It is amazing to find how many night workers there are in London. Most of them must have made an acquaintance with the County Courts during these years, for the first time.

Tram and bus cleaners, who left home at eleven in the evening, and returned at six in the morning, were all nuisances, especially when more than the legal rent was desired for their rooms. One of these men was turned out because the lavatory cistern made a peculiar hissing noise, when used before he left for work, although he had repeatedly asked the landlord to remedy it.

A dead set seems to have been made against railwaymen and tram and bus workers: I do not know why, except that they generally have to live owing to their early and late hours of employment, near their sheds and garages, which are upon the outskirts of London, the *El Dorados* of the speculative builder.

To live with some of the new purchasers of houses must have been almost impossible. Even when the tenant made no noise whatever, he was accused of having gone about the house like a ghost, and thus annoyed the landlord by giving him a creepy feeling.

A series of epidemics of nuisances sprang up periodically in different districts, owing to the report in the Press of a tenant being turned out for some unusual offence. For a few months, throwing sardine tins out of upstairs windows seemed to be a favourite excuse for asking for an order. Then salmon tins replaced them as a welcome variant, to be followed by all kinds of filth, until the throwing mania petered out in crumbs from the poor man's table being shaken from a table cloth.

Sweeping dirt into the passage through the banisters was often added as a piece of make-weight, and one day we were favoured with a choice tit-bit by the allegation that our tenant had placed a dead mouse upon one of the stairs. As only the landlady kept a cat in the house, it was gravely decided by the Judge that pussy had established a new larder.

It was always a pleasant relief to meet with something new in the way of imputations. We thought we had found one once when a tenant was solemnly accused of having defrauded the householder by placing seventy-eight farthings in the shilling-in-the-slot gas meter. A large envelope containing the farthings as an exhibit of the crime was displayed in court. Here were all the elements of a "cause célèbre"; but it came to nothing, as the explanation was quite simple. For six years these very same farthings had always been used for obtaining a supply of gas, as the weight of two farthings was the same as that of a shilling, and when the meter was cleared the farthings had always been redeemed. Upon this occasion the householder had kept them, and had refused to allow the tenant to convert them into shillings, thinking this was a glorious opportunity of getting rid of him.

Many tenants had been induced to buy the houses in which they lived, and finding they had made a bad bargain, they sought to eject their sub-tenants, many of whom had been with them for years, in order to get more rent for the rooms and thus lighten their own liabilities. Some of these new property owners were at their wits' end to know how to pay their way, and being desperate they adopted desperate means to achieve their object. The female element

now entered into the conflict, and that was far more deadly and unscrupulous than the male. A campaign of persecution and perjury developed on all hands. A relentless war for security raged everywhere, some for the security that money could give, but the poorest for the security that a home alone afforded.

Some solicitors were willing to take any case as long as they were paid for it, no matter how thin their chances might be of obtaining possession, and no tenant was safe unless he could secure legal assistance. We were fortunate at this crisis in being able to augment our legal forces by obtaining the assistance of a young solicitor who had resumed practice after war service in the East; and of Sir Alfred Callaghan, an intrepid Irish fighter, whose services in the House of Commons would have been invaluable to us in the cause of fair play, had Rochester secured him as its member when it had a chance.

A solicitor at one court informed me that he had seven cases that day, none of which he deserved to win. I asked him why he had entertained them. His reply was that he was getting ten pounds for each case, and if he succeeded he would receive an extra ten pounds, as possession in every instance was worth at least three hundred pounds to his client, so he could afford to be generous. "It always pays us better to fight for the landlord," he confided to me. If he had not taken these cases somebody else would have done so.

These summonses were fought with a ferocity unusual in County Courts. There was no more difficult position in the country than that of a County Court Judge at this time. Every court was packed

with litigants and their victims, and some courts sat as late as midnight, and then had to adjourn numbers of cases for want of time.

As tenants would not help their landlords to turn them out by acting in an outrageous manner, there was nothing for it, they must be made to do so. A régime of petty tyranny was commenced to encourage tenants to be naughty. Commands were issued to them that they must get up before a certain time, that they must fetch their water and empty their dust by such an hour, and that if they were not in by ten at night the door would be bolted, and they would have to spend the night in the street.

Naturally this led to high words, especially when an attempt was made to enforce these rules. Language on both sides became ruddy, and sometimes worse. And so it came about that the use of bad language was sure to be one of the many accusations against a tenant, and when this was treated seriously by the Court, he had some difficulty in defending himself.

A man once, before Judge Cluer, said he had never used bad language in his life.

"Don't tell such lies, man," said the Judge. "Everybody has used bad language some time or another. I am frequently provoked to use it myself in this Court."

Bad language was at last reduced to its proper proportion by Judge Sturges, who refused to be influenced by such pleas, as he said he always found it to consist of the same small group of words, the use of which was evidence of a limited vocabulary, and he was not disposed to turn people out on that ground.

Finally, in order to get a move on, tenants were subjected to an organised system of torture. They were persistently provoked by jeers and sneers and insults; by the continual banging of doors; by deprivation of the use of the scullery for washing clothes, and the garden for drying them; by their clothes-lines being cut down when full and their laundry thus rendered useless; by the gas being disconnected; and the coal cellar taken from them; and by challenges to come out and fight, in order that they might take the initiative in laying hands upon the landlord. If they gave way to the provocation, a summons for assault was immediately issued in the Police Court, and the Magistrates would bind them over to keep the peace. At once an order for possession would be granted in the County Court, as the majority of Judges would accept the binding-over as sufficient proof of a nuisance and annoyance, and would refuse to discuss the matter, treating it as being already settled.

Many of these summonses in the Police Court for alleged assault were never heard. Tenants were often kept hanging about the Court all day, losing a day's wages; and fearful lest they might have to lose more time still, they would willingly consent to be bound over when asked by the sergeant, thinking this a mere formality that carried with it no further consequences.

If not tricked out of their homes in this way, the annoyance from the landlord and his family, against whom they had no legal remedy, so affected the health of their wives and children that they were driven to find other places, no matter how inadequate so long as they could get peace.

It was also interesting to note how Judges had their pet prejudices.

One Judge was specially down upon any tenant who kept rabbits. As soon as the word "rabbit" was mentioned he bristled up and became quite fierce. I often wondered if he had been bitten by one. This was soon noticed by solicitors practising in his court, who always tried to bring a rabbit into their cases if they wanted possession. Many a tenant have I saved, by getting him to find a friend to look after his rabbits, until the case was over.

Another Judge had a prejudice against babies. He enjoyed lecturing parents with large families. He was a kindly man and did not mean all he said. His remarks usually resolved themselves into condemnation of poverty, as he would not have spoken in that way to a wealthy man.

But poverty was the greatest factor in our problem, and babies seem to have been sent by Providence to the poor to keep them human.

Whoever may have won the war, it is certain that His Majesty the Baby has not done so. At one time he was honoured with "Baby Weeks," and "Baby Shows" and was even patronised by the wife of the Prime Minister. Since landladies have captured the Government, the baby has become an abomination. None of the landladies would let any rooms to him. And I have even seen written by them upon rent books, as a condition of tenancy, that the tenants must agree not to give birth to any children whilst residing in their rooms. The customary congratulations upon the birth of a child were not complete without a notice to quit. All attempts to enforce such notices failed, as the Judges

remarked that Parliament had not yet placed birth control in the power of the landladies of this country.

The cramping of the people into more restricted space has made life less comfortable for everyone. The lack of elbow room has caused an amount of bumping up against neighbours, and made nerves raw and sensitive. And the presence of a baby, especially a first-born, together with the pride of the young mother, have not helped matters.

In working-class quarters the perambulator is usually the centre of conflict. No writer has described this trouble with greater insight than Arnold Bennett, in the following description of Elsie's home in "*Riceyman Steps*."

"The centre of irritation in the house was the entrance-hall, or lobby, which the first floor and ground floor had to keep clean in alternate weekly spells. On the previous day one of the first-floor children had dragged treacly fingers along the dark-yellowish-brown wall. Further, the first-floor perambulator had been brought in with muddy wheels and the marks had dried on the linoleum, which was already a palimpsest of various unclean deposits. This perambulator was the origin of most of the lobby trouble. The ground floor resented its presence there, and the second floor purposely knocked it about at every passage through the lobby; but the mistress of the first floor obstinately objected to carrying it up and down stairs once or twice a day.

"A great three-cornered quarrel had arisen on the Saturday morning around the first-floor perambulator and the entrance-hall, and when the french-polisher arrived home for his dinner, shortly

after one o'clock he had found no dinner, but a wife-helpmeet-cook-housekeeper-maid-servant in hysterics. Very foolishly he had immediately gone forth again with all his wages. At eleven-thirty p.m. he had returned intoxicated and acutely dyspeptic. At a quarter to twelve he had tried to fight Elsie. At twelve-thirty the meat-salesman had come home to sleep, and had had to listen to a loud sermon on the manners of the first-floor and his own wife's manners delivered from the second-floor stairs. Subsequently he had had to listen to moans from the mistress of the first-floor and the eternal coughing of the master of the first-floor And all about nothing! Yet every one of the adults was well acquainted with the admirable text which exhorted Christians to bear one another's burdens. A strange household! But there were some scores of such households in Riceyman Square, and a £4,500 church in the midst. . . . Although there were at least three Bibles in the house, they had failed to cultivate the virtue of Christian resignation. They permitted trifles to annoy them."

One landlady was annoyed because her lodger would smoke cigarettes in his rooms, whilst another objected to the particular brand of tobacco her lodger favoured.

A widower sent me a letter he had received from his landlady telling him he must give up his rooms in a week's time unless he married her. She hoped for better luck with her next lodger.

Most of the accusations of nuisance and annoyance were concoctions. Hundreds of tenants have asked me to assist them to frame up such cases against

their lodgers, as they could get more rent by letting the rooms furnished. I can recall very few genuine instances of this nature.

One concerned a policeman. He had taken a house, the upper part of which was occupied by a maiden lady, who lived alone. She would have been an ideal lodger, but she was annoyed because the owner would not let the house to one of her friends. Therefore, to spite him, she tried to make the policeman's life a misery. When he came home after night duty, she would disturb his rest by running up and down stairs and rattling her broom handle against the banisters. At the slightest word of remonstrance, she would throw open the window or the front door, and scream, "Murder." She wrote folios of complaints to his superior officers, and finally when she was ordered to leave the house, she would follow him about whilst on duty and dance around him in the streets.

Another instance was that of a harmless little lady, the member of an Ethical Society, who was assailed by an overbearing Polish Jewess, with an uplifted chopper, and the threat to cut her head off. Finding that this did not intimidate her, she tried to impale her with a clothes prop, but missing her aim, she brought down the scullery window instead.

Some women would not mind their own business. A tenant complained that her lodger was proclaiming far and wide that her eldest son was a bastard. The Judge asked the lodger if she had said this, and she, arrogantly proud of the truth of her assertion, replied, "Yes, I did say so. And I shall say so again. She can't deny the truth of it."

"Then, I must make an order that you give up

your rooms in a month," said the Judge. "I cannot imagine any annoyance worse than continually reminding another woman of an indiscretion. The truth of the allegation adds to the annoyance."

CHAPTER XXIX

BREACHES OF AGREEMENT AND WASTE

IN addition to the charges of nuisance and annoyance, there were gradually added allegations of breach of agreement and waste. Many tenants had held their houses for twenty years and more, and after the expiry of their first agreement they had remained as yearly tenants. They had never known what trouble with a landlord meant, until one day the house was sold and the new purchaser, possibly a house-jobber, went through the agreement with an eye for every comma, seeking for a loophole through which he might secure possession.

An elderly lady, who lived with her two daughters, and whose only means of living was obtained through dressmaking they did at home, was one day sued for possession in the High Court of Chancery, because she had a brass plate with the word "Modes" engraved upon it, fixed to the front gate. Years before the war, the landlord, who had recently died, had given permission for the plate to be put up, but as she had nothing in writing to that effect, and the agreement stated that the house was let as a private dwelling only, it was contended that, by announcing that she made dresses, she had broken the agreement and had therefore forfeited all rights to possession. It was a mean excuse to turn her out, and showed that in every other way she was a good tenant. To bring the action in the High Court instead of the County Court was a mean pro-

ceeding, as the woman was very poor, and this form of trial necessitated a large expenditure of money to defend. After a long and costly fight, she was allowed to remain if she did away with the plate, but she had to pay her own costs, which amounted to more than a year's rent.

The substitution of High Court actions in place of the simple method of the County Courts was a trick played very often upon poor tenants to prevent them from defending themselves. The lame excuse was made, that it was cheaper for the tenant, as the landlord could not claim costs, but the real reason was that the poor could not so easily present their case. Two railway-servants, living about a hundred miles from London, in cottages of a rental of four shillings and sixpence a week, were served with High Court writs. Their landlord was a tricky customer, and to get possession of these houses, he had transferred them from himself to a firm of which he was managing director, and claimed the houses for the occupation of workmen employed by the firm. If they had not had a friend in London like the War Rents League they would have been completely unable to defeat this attempt to take advantage of their poverty.

The most heartless instances were those in which soldiers' widows were turned out because they let rooms to boarders, the contention being that they had turned the house into business premises. In arranging war widows' pensions, many were given a weekly allowance, which they were expected to supplement by going out to work. In cases where there were small children that required a mother's continuous care, the Government would grant these

widows a sum of money to furnish the house so that they could let rooms and thus make enough to keep them at home to look after their families. The speculator liked to buy a house like this, as he had no difficulty in turning the woman out, and neither he nor the Government worried about the loss of her home, her livelihood, nor of her capitalised pension.

I know of sad instances of refined gentlewomen who let rooms with attendance to business men. There was no suggestion of profiteering. The city men had lived with them for years, and looked upon the house as their home. They had all become used to each other's ways, and the home and services given was all these ladies had in the world to rely upon. And yet, a straining of the law destroyed such households by declaring them to be businesses.

Poorer tenants were usually given rent cards upon which were printed a mass of conditions governing the letting of their house or rooms. Before the war, these cards never contained any stipulation against sub-letting part of the house. As there was some risk of the houses standing empty for an indefinite time, landlords were only too pleased to let them to tenants who could not afford to pay the rent of the whole house, and in order to get their rent for the whole of the premises they were only too willing to allow sub-letting.

Suddenly in 1921, these rent cards, which are issued yearly, appeared with a strict stipulation that no sub-letting was permitted, printed in small type among the other rules and regulations. Many tenants foolishly gave up their earlier cards to the agents, and when summoned to the Court for possession

they discovered the trick played upon them, as the claim was made upon the ground that they had sub-let without permission. An undefended and unsuspecting tenant having such a point sprung upon him was mystified. He had never seen the alteration before, and his plea that he had sub-let for years was not convincing to the Judge who had the rent book before him. Sometimes the tenant would subsequently discover an old rent book and appeal to the Judge to set the order for ejectment aside, only to be told that he should have produced that evidence when the case was heard; it was too late now.

The charge of waste, or the wilful destruction or neglect to prevent destruction of the landlord's property, was often added to every other accusation. so that among so many there might be one chance by which possession could be obtained.

I remember a tenant being ejected for cutting down a coarse creeper that had been pulled away from the gutters of the house, and left to hang over his windows, shutting out the light from his rooms. Another time, a middle-aged lady was turned out because she had some trees lopped at the back of the house.

The most striking instance I can recall of allegations of waste, although mixed up with all kinds of other complaints, concerns a Scottish woman, who was a wonderful personality.

Mr. Mac, his wife and family became tenants of a house in 1915, when the owner promised to repair it and make it habitable, as the fences were broken down and the grates were worn out. Years went by and nothing was done to it. The owner kept promising and putting it off, and then he tried to

frighten the tenant into purchasing it from him at an enormous price. Because Mr. Mac would not entertain this proposal, and it was feared that he might call in the Sanitary Inspector, plans were quietly made to get him out. A neighbour several houses away was willing to assist the landlord, so supported by a barrister, a solicitor, a sanitary inspector, a workman, the neighbour, her husband and two children, he proceeded to the Court prepared to teach Mr. Mac a lesson for refusing to purchase his worn out house at the price of a new one.

Mr. and Mrs. Mac were there with their two adjoining neighbours, and were defended by a young solicitor.

As the case was opened the Macs seemed to have all their work cut out to protect themselves. They were accused of being a nuisance and annoyance to their neighbours; of using foul and blasphemous language; Mrs. Mac was said to have threatened to murder the woman at the end house, and to have been bound over at the Police Court to keep the peace. It was alleged that they were filthy tenants and that chickens were running all over the ground floor rooms, and that they had committed waste by doing away with the fence and the gate in front of the house, and that they had also damaged the stove.

The sanitary inspector said he had visited the house on a certain date and found it in a filthy condition. In cross-examination he admitted that he had gone to the house in response to an anonymous communication, and that he attended the Court by request of the landlord. The workman said he had seen fowls running about the house, and the neighbour and her family enjoyed themselves in laying on the agony.

The prospects looked very black for the tenants until Mrs. Mac was called to give evidence. She was a middle-aged woman, very stout, and with features that displayed a great strength of character.

Everything depended upon her, and she knew it, as she stood in the witness box, calm and collected, and answered the damaging questions levelled against her, in a rich voice made more impressive by a pronounced burr.

It was interesting to watch the simple manner in which this working Scottish woman overcame the skilled cross-examiner. If she had been an Englishwoman, she would have instinctively called all the allegations against her, lies; she would have denied them strenuously, and she would have produced the impression upon everyone that they were true.

But Mrs. Mac knew them to be more dangerous than lies, as they were half truths. So she answered them by admitting them, and then explained her admissions by supplying the whole of the truth.

"Is it true that when the Sanitary Inspector called upon you, the house was in a filthy condition?" asked the landlord's barrister.

"Yes, it is quite true," admitted Mrs. Mac. "I had been bed-ridden for six weeks, from a malady from which I am still suffering, and which I am informed cannot be cured. The morning the Inspector called, after my husband had gone to work, I dragged myself from my bed, although it was against the doctor's orders for me to get up, and I came downstairs as I was worried about my house. My husband had been very good, he had done the best he could to keep the place in order. But, I ask you, Sir, what could the poor man do with six

children to feed, and look after, and with me to attend to as well? When the Inspector called, I was turning out the kitchen and was in the midst of cleaning. I was horrified at the state of my rooms. The Inspector knows all about it, as I explained it to him, and he apologised for troubling me. I thought he had called to see the stove, which I showed him, and he said it was suffering from old age."

"Is it not true that chickens run all over your kitchen?" asked the Counsel.

"It is true," replied Mrs. Mac, "that upon one occasion the chickens did run about my kitchen. But it is only true upon this one occasion. And that was when the workman was there trying to patch up the stove, which I am said to have broken, but which he said was worn out and beyond repair. He asked me if I wanted to sell any chickens, as his wife would like some, and I said I might. He then asked me to drive them into the kitchen so that he could select some, and he bought a dozen from me. That is the occasion the workman refers to. It is quite true, the chickens were in the kitchen, at his request."

At this point the Judge recalled the workman and asked him if this statement was true, and he admitted that it was. He had never been in the house at any other time.

"It is true, is it not, that the whole of the fencing in the front of the house has disappeared?" continued counsel.

"Yes, that is quite true," said Mrs. Mac. "When we first came to the house it was falling down, and we asked the landlord until we were tired of asking,

to have it repaired, but he would not do anything to it."

"What have you done with the palings, then?" asked the counsel, thinking that at last he could make a point.

"You must ask the landlord that," said Mrs. Mac smiling, "or better still, ask his workman there, as he took all the palings away, and mended the fences of the other houses with them."

The workman was again recalled and he admitted that this was true.

"Now, Mrs. Mac," asked the counsel, feeling sure that he was playing his trump card, which he had kept to the last, "you cannot deny that you were summoned to the Police Court and were bound over for using foul and blasphemous language and for threatening to murder the woman at the corner house?"

"It is quite true," replied Mrs. Mac, not at all perturbed, "that I was summoned to the Police Court and was bound over. There was a misunderstanding, as the Magistrates would not let me say a word, and the police hustled me out before I had a chance of explaining.

"But it is untrue to say that I have ever used foul or blasphemous language, or that I have ever threatened to murder this woman. I have never used foul language, Sir; and I have never taken the name of my Maker in vain. But, Sir, I have used strong language; and in the circumstances I shall do so again. I am a mother with young daughters, and as long as they live beneath my roof they must be in by ten o'clock at night. I will not have them hanging about the streets at all hours. One night,

one of my girls did not come home to time, so I waited for her, and caught her in the road at half past ten. I admonished her, and I told her I would sooner kill her than that she should bring dishonour upon herself and her parents. At that moment, the woman at the corner was passing, and she jumped at the opportunity to say that I threatened her. I never spoke to her. I don't want to speak to her. She is the mischief-maker of the neighbourhood."

Her next-door neighbours were called. They said they had never known a better neighbour, nor a larger-hearted woman than Mrs. Mac. She was always the first to whom everyone turned in time of trouble, and was known all around for her kindness as Mother Mac. The woman at the corner was the nuisance, as she was the landlord's tout interested in selling his houses and getting the tenants ejected.

Mrs. Mac came off triumphant, and she received a great ovation outside the Court house. Even the opposing barrister congratulated her, and turning to me, he said he had never had such an easy case according to his brief, but he had never before heard evidence that so impressed him with its truthfulness.

I must not forget the celebrated case of the vanishing wall. A carman, the tenant of a house with stabling in the rear, was summoned to give up possession because he had repeatedly complained of the disrepair of his premises, and especially of the roof of the stables. The stables were in such a bad condition that he had already lost one horse worth forty-five pounds, through pneumonia, brought

on by the wind and the wet, and he was entering an action against his landlady for damages. She lived next door to him, and owned the whole street, and she had announced to everybody that she was going to get him out because he was a nuisance and annoyance to his neighbours. Therefore we had secured the attendance in Court of thirty-two neighbours, all her other tenants in the street, to say that the carman was the best fellow on earth.

To our utmost surprise, the chief claim for possession was made upon the ground of waste, it being alleged that the carman had destroyed and removed a wall. According to the landlady's evidence it was a wall nine feet long, six feet high, and about two feet wide, and it was supposed to have been erected in the stable.

I was annoyed that the carman had not informed me of this, and when I reproached him he protested that he knew nothing about any wall, he had never seen one all the ten years he had been tenant, and he was sure he had never knocked one down. I asked him if there was any person in Court, who knew the premises when he became the tenant, and he pointed out a man standing at the back. I approached him and found that he was the landlady's son. He said his mother must be mad to make such statements, but he knew that she was unscrupulous. There was originally a wall in the stable, but it had been taken down thirty years ago, before the carman ever saw the place, and he was willing to come forward and give evidence to that effect.

With this knowledge in our possession, Mr. Schultess Young cross-examined the old landlady. He made her repeat the dimensions of the wall, and

then asked whether she had seen the going of it. She said she had not.

"There must have been a large number of bricks in such a wall as you describe," said counsel. "Did you never see any of the bricks about?"

"No," she said, "I have not seen either the bricks or the wall."

"It isn't a sort of thing that you could pick up and put in your waistcoat pocket, and run away with, is it? What do you suggest happened to it?"

"It vanished, that is all I know," she replied. "I don't know when, or how, or where, but it vanished, and this man must have caused it to go."

"I would suggest to you that you are mistaken," said counsel, trying to bring her to reason. "There was never any wall there since this man has been your tenant."

She still persisted in her assertion, and further complained that he was a nuisance because she could smell horse manure in his garden. She forgot she had let the place for stabling for horses, and her objection in this respect seemed to be more against the particular class of horses than the tenant.

The carman gave evidence, and when he told the truth that he had never seen a wall there, and had never heard of one being there before he came into Court, it was obvious to everyone that the Judge did not believe a word he said.

Had it not been for the landlady's son he would have been turned out. The son explained that many years ago, a wall divided the stable, so that two horses could be stalled, but thirty years ago this wall was removed and two wooden boards substituted for it, so that three ponies could be accommodated.

Subsequently, one of these boards had been taken down and the other placed in the centre so that the stable could be used for two horses again. He was present when his mother let the stables to this tenant, and he could swear that no wall existed at that time.

When the case was won and over, I went up to our chief witness, and thanked him for his evidence, and asked him what was the trouble with his mother. He explained that his father had left his mother an interest in his house property for her life, and that when she died it would all come to him. He was not looking forward to that time with any pleasure, as he would come into possession of the most fearful lot of ruins that could be imagined, worth nothing to anybody. His mother grabbed every farthing she could get, and refused to spend anything upon keeping the houses in repair, and she had the best tenants on earth. He did not seem to know that he had power to compel her to keep the property in proper condition, so he left the Court with some useful knowledge as a recompense for his straightforward action in securing justice for the carman.

CHAPTER XXX

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF

AN ill-considered attempt to assist ex-service men, whose gratuities had been swallowed up in the purchase of occupied houses, was made by the insertion in the Act of a clause, whereby they might obtain part possession, provided there was accommodation in the same house for the tenant. Once again was the tenant to be made the sufferer because of the inconsiderate action of others, and the victimised ex-service man was to be assisted at the tenant's expense alone. The gate of the Englishman's castle was to be thrown open so that his stronghold might be captured in sections.

Soldier was pitted against soldier, and soldier against civilian. Not even the homes of dead comrades were to be immune from attack. Forcible entry into small dwelling-houses and the squeezing of families into fewer rooms were resumed with the direct sanction of Parliament.

House jobbers were jubilant. At last, they had something to offer in exchange for a war gratuity, and in due course, they would even be able to collect the presents made to the "Black and Tans."

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," became a useful business maxim. If the ex-service man could only get his head into the house by obtaining one or two rooms, nothing was easier than to drive the tenant out of the remaining part. All the multifarious forms of nuisance and annoyance could be indulged in to his heart's delight, without

restraint being placed upon him (for was he not the owner of the house?), and if this conduct did not drive out the tenant, but caused him to retaliate, then he could always fall back upon the Courts to assist in getting rid of him. Once the house was free of these encumbrances, up it would go for sale with vacant possession, and the same game would start again elsewhere.

In some instances the tenant had to suffer martyrdom; evil smelling chemicals sprinkled upon his door mat; india-rubber burned beneath his windows; his private correspondence intercepted, delayed and opened and should the tenant turn the other cheek, and refuse to walk into the trap, the owner would reside in his rooms for a few months, and would sell the house with possession of them. The tenant would then be subjected to another system of torture from the new purchaser.

The huge profits, to be reaped by these speculators, well repaid any inconvenience they suffered—in fact, it was a condition of the game—and when the house was sold, there was always the back room at mother's to fall back upon, which again supplied the setting for the pitiful tale of hardship, necessary to start successfully the next venture.

Some unusually smart ex-service men and agents, seeing the possibilities afforded by this loophole in the Act, organised an onslaught upon the homes of unsuspecting tenants. A needy ex-soldier with a family, living in one room, would be nominally declared by a house-jobber to be the new owner of a house. After he had duly carried out his orders, and through the Court effected an entrance and turned out the garrison, the house would be sold by

the jobber, and he would receive a share of the plunder.

Some house-jobbers were always ready to stage manage any case of hardship, and it was done so cleverly that it deluded not only the Judges but the tenants as well. To find information about the new purchaser of a house would in some cases have baffled Sherlock Holmes. He was a most elusive individual. He was always springing up suddenly from nowhere, in a district where no one knew him, and he was always living and sleeping with a huge family, either in a scullery or a bath room, with one child at least suffering from consumption, and his wife half dead or expecting to give birth to another child in a few weeks. There must have been a touring company of these people, as I found them performing the same old melodrama of the homeless ex-soldier in various parts of the country. One of these quick-change artistes endeavoured to sell me some houses, in which he was speculating, at places as far apart as Brighton and Richmond. Some months later I was surprised to find him in a County Court under another name, seeking possession of some rooms in a house, and in a drooping voice telling a sad, sad story of living in a top back room. I recognised him only just in time, otherwise he would have got them. His surprise and confusion at the questions about his large property deals upset his apple cart that time. I have no doubt he is still pulling the Government's leg, terrifying tenants, and making a thousand a year by adapting his cases to this clause in the Act.

All this was no joke to the 'disturbed tenants. Either their families were split up, or else they

were compelled to crowd with them into any rooms they could get, at rents that deprived them of the means of rational subsistence.

Both ex-service man and tenants were fair game for the gambler and exploiter. Business was business, so why worry? And yet, there was still sufficient sentiment alive to make it difficult to obtain an impartial judgment for a tenant when an ex-service man was concerned.

A member of the National Union of Transport Workers was sued for possession of three of his rooms by an ex-service man who had bought his house. The house consisted of six rooms and was occupied by the tenant and his children, his aged and infirm father and mother, who were dependent upon him, and his sister with her husband and family. His sister was the only capable woman in the house, and without her constant assistance it was impossible to look after the old people and his young children whilst he was away at work.

Immediately the Judge heard that the owner was an ex-service man, there was no hope for this united family. He ordered that the two rooms occupied by the trade unionist and his children, together with the old people's bedroom, should be given up, otherwise they would all have to leave the house.

It was almost inconceivable that a family should be blown to pieces in this manner. Yet, there it was, and to appeal against this judgement was to take a long chance, as the cost of doing so would not be less than thirty pounds, and should the tenant lose, another fifty pounds might be added to that amount, and should he not be able to pay he ran the risk of having his home seized and sold. Justice is said

to be free to all. It is a pity that she is blindfold and cannot see those who are seeking her. The poor man has great difficulty in getting even a glimpse of her without the loan of the golden key that gives admittance to her presence.

Leaving my office one morning, a few days after this astounding decision, I wandered into the Law Courts to while away half an hour, and I found myself in the Divisional Court, over which Mr. Justice Lush and Mr. Justice McCardie were presiding.

As I entered, Mr. Justice McCardie was giving judgment in a money-lending case. I was not particularly interested, but I stood and listened, and I gradually became fascinated with the clear and methodical manner in which he was explaining the law upon the subject, and elucidating the principles upon which it was founded, before applying it to the case in question.

The Court adjourned for half an hour. So impressed was I by the Judge's learning and ability, that I returned to the Court after lunch, to sit at his feet again.

To my surprise, the next case called was one under the Rent Act. It was an appeal by a landlord from a judgment of a country County Court Judge, and as the facts were unfolded to the Court, I followed them breathlessly. What an act of Providence! It was almost too good to be true! Here was a case exactly upon the same lines as that of the trade unionist. Out came my note book, and down went every word that was said.

It appeared that a man upon joining the Air Force broke up his home and stored his furniture, and his

wife went to live with her parents. On demobilisation, being unable to rent a house, he bought a six-roomed house in which there lived a widow and her son and daughter. She was compelled to take in lodgers to supplement her income in order that she and her family could live. The ex-service man asked for possession of all but two unfurnished rooms with part use of the bath room and the kitchen. The County Court Judge decided that the accommodation offered to the tenant was not reasonably sufficient, and that an order which necessitated the breaking up of the household as it existed, and obliged the tenant to send some of her furniture to a warehouse, would not be justified.

The ex-service man now appealed against this decision, upon the grounds that the Court had not to take into consideration the lodgers or the furniture, and that sufficient accommodation for the widow and her two children had been offered in the two rooms and part use of the kitchen. There was also a technicality dealing with mesne profits that had been paid into court and paid out again to the tenant.

The Divisional Court Judges decided that the County Court Judge was right, and they upheld his judgment by dismissing the appeal. Mr. Justice Lush laid it down that the accommodation must be sufficient for the tenant and those who lived with her. It would not be reasonable to make an order which would have the effect of depriving the tenant of her means of livelihood.

Mr. Justice McCardie, in agreeing with this view, dwelt at some length upon the intention of the Act, and explained that the word "tenant" included children, domestics, servants and relatives living with

the tenant, whether aged or not, and there was no reason why lodgers should be excluded.

Nothing could be stronger; it fitted our case at every point; and as we had not the money to appeal and as the Judge had not permitted all the evidence to be heard, having made up his mind at the start, we thought he might be induced to grant a new trial, or else to suspend, vary or rescind his order, and in this way serve the interests of justice without putting this working man to expense.

The first essential was a newspaper report of the decision. I imagined that there would be at least a column in the papers the next morning. But I looked in vain. Possibly it had been held over until the following day, but there was still no mention of it then. When a decision had been in favour of the landlord, I had noticed there was always the fullest publicity at once. So as this case must be made public, I sent a report from my notes to the Press; and of all the papers, "*The Star*" was the only one that printed it. I also communicated with the country solicitors asking them to send me any report in their local press, and I urged them to use their influence with the law reporters to have the judgment printed without delay.

With two printed reports, we went again to the Judge, who refused to look at them, remarking that as the law papers had not noticed the case, they did not think it worth printing. He disagreed with the decision, and if we were going to appeal he hoped we would not succeed, and when a stay of execution was requested with a view to entering an appeal he refused, saying he would put every difficulty in the tenant's way.

After such a challenge, there was of course nothing to be done but to appeal. So with the assistance of Mr. Alf Smith of the Transport Workers' Union, and the man's colleagues, enough money was raised to set the appeal down for hearing. Our troubles were far from over, as upon the case being called it was discovered that the Judge in his notes had stated us out of court upon a technical point; but the Appeal Judges were sympathetic towards us, and gave special permission to enter a fresh appeal, and they expedited the hearing. Seeing now that he had no chance of winning, the landlord wisely gave way.

It was not until six weeks after the country case had been decided, that the Law Journals printed a report of it, and I do not think that they would have done so then, but for the continual applications for it from solicitors and barristers, as this was the topic of conversation in every court, and my report was worn out by being handed round. Even when it was printed very little space was given to the tenant's side of the case, the greater space being devoted to the question of mesne profits.

Whilst the insistent attacks upon tenants, described in the last few chapters, were being beaten off, a hubbub was going on, on all sides, owing to the increases of rent. Thousands of tenants, who had entered into occupation since the beginning of the war, became aware, for the first time, that they had been charged more than the standard rent. They had never troubled about this before, and would not have worried about it now, but the landlords, fearing lest their overcharges might be found out, and that they would have to repay large amounts, served

notices falsely stating the standard rent, and thus increasing the rents out of all reason. Tenants experienced the utmost difficulty in obtaining a true statement of the pre-war rent, although the Act placed the duty of supplying it upon the landlord under a penalty of ten pounds. But as magistrates would accept any lame excuse for not fulfilling this legal duty, the burden of digging it out was thrust upon the tenant. As years have gone by, it has become almost impossible for any tenant to discover what the house was let for in 1914, if it has had more than one occupier or owner since the war.

The notices of increases themselves were filled in in the most slipshod manner, and as it was a statutory notice and had to be strictly correct to be enforced, the majority of them were not worth the paper upon which they were written. From my experience, and I have examined many thousands from all parts of the country, not more than ten per cent. were accurate.

Many tenants would not pay these irregular increases, and in spite of the penalty for entering arrears in the rent book when nothing was owing, landlord and agents ignored this boldly, for they knew they would not be fined. So much were these penalty clauses a dead letter, that after the first attempts to enforce them had failed, the War Rents League never advised tenants to resort to them.

The very poorest of tenants, those paying less than twenty pounds a year rent, were nearly always proceeded against in the Police Courts under the Small Tenements Act, and the difference of treatment received there from what was experienced in the County Courts was most noticeable. The majority

of Magistrates and Petty Justices did not worry about Rent Acts; they were above such ephemeral legislation. The tenant was hardly allowed a chance to speak, and the mere mention of the Rent Act by him was accounted a crime. If he had deducted overpaid rent as he was entitled to do, he was told he had no right to do so, and was turned out in consequence. Arrears in rent books were accepted as gospel, and the matter treated as one outside the province of the Court to look into.

A poor man, who was being turned out of his one room, because he refused to pay an illegal increase, and whose landlord had entered these increases up as arrears, came to me one morning, and explained his case. I assisted him to draw up a statement of the facts to take to the Court, and upon those grounds to ask to be allowed to make an application for the warrant to be set aside.

He returned, saying that the sergeant at the door of the Court refused to allow him to go in to apply to the Magistrate. So the next morning, I went to the Court myself. Seeing me looking about the lobby, the sergeant thought that I must be a landlord. He sidled up to me and at the same time, holding out the palm of his hand from the middle of his back, he said confidentially, "If you want to turn out an undesirable tenant, sir, I will see that it is all right." I smiled, as I recalled a common saying among tenants, that there is a race of men with three hands, one growing out of the middle of their back; so smacking his hand vigorously, I retorted, "No, constable, there is no half-crown this morning. I am concerned with an undesirable landlord, and I want to know which is the Clerk's office."

There I received the greatest courtesy and assistance, as I have always done, and the necessary preliminaries were completed for the warrant to be set aside, which the Magistrate did most graciously when the matter was explained to him by the counsel who appeared for the tenant.

The increase of rates and the forty per cent. increase were burdensome to many tenants, especially those who were unemployed and in receipt of the dole. Whilst they drew the dole they could pay the rent, but during the fifteen weeks that came round at stated intervals, when the dole ceased, and all they had to live upon was obtained by means of food tickets from the Guardians, the rent had to go unpaid. This unpaid rent was a dead weight upon them, as they were rarely able to make it up again, stint themselves as much as they might, during the next period when they received the unemployment allowance. Many landlords were compassionate, and tried to lighten their tenants' burdens. But there were a considerable number who saw, in this state of affairs, another chance of getting the tenant out. Some of these were despicable in their methods. During the fifteen weeks' break, they would tell the tenant not to worry about the rent, as they quite understood, and that would be all right, and they would enter up the arrears every week until as much as ten pounds would be owing. Then they would spring a summons upon the tenant for possession on account of rent being in arrear, just as the payment of the dole was to start again. In Court they would parade their kindness in allowing the tenant to run on so long, and they would casually observe that as he was now in receipt of the dole he could pay

if he would. The Judge would look severe and give the man a lecture, telling him he could not expect to live rent free, and what did he think the dole was for if it was not to pay his landlord? He ordered him to pay the current rent and often as much as five shillings a week off the arrears, otherwise a warrant for his ejectment would be issued. Added to the amount of rent, there were costs, which often ran into more than ten pounds.

It was impossible for these tenants to pay the sums ordered by the Court. For the first few weeks they would struggle to do so. Everything that could be pawned would be taken to "Uncle's," including war medals and the wife's wedding ring, and at the first failure to keep up the payments, a warrant would be automatically granted by the Court, without the tenant having any notice to appear. At one time no warrant could be issued without a special application being made, at which the tenant had a chance of asking the Judge to vary the order on account of his change of circumstances. But as soon as the Courts' Emergency Act expired, this safeguard for the tenant vanished.

This method of procedure found great favour, as it was the easiest and most certain way of getting houses vacant. Those who were displaced were in the worst plight of all, for they had no money, nobody would take them in on account of their poverty, and their only hopes of getting on their feet again were destroyed. In a number of cases the workhouse became their shelter, where they had to remain, because they were stigmatised, even by the Guardians, as being culpable because they owed rent.

CHAPTER XXXI

A DOUBLE-EDGED WEAPON

ABOUT this time, a decision was given that no increase of rent was legal unless it had been preceded by a notice to quit. Therefore when these people, who were upon the verge of being ejected because rent was owing, came to me, I would examine most carefully their increase notices, and if I could find the slightest loophole that could be used in their defence, I would seize hold of it. The absence of a notice to quit became the way of salvation for hundreds of homes. Cases would be re-opened and judgments set aside, and instead of the tenant owing the landlord £10, he would sometimes come out of Court with a decision that no rent was owing to date, and that his landlord owed him £20.

The sudden shock of finding themselves safe would cause anxious parents of families to burst into tears outside the Court. They were incapable of understanding what had brought the change of circumstances about. They would declare that it was a miracle, and in this they were not far wrong, as it was a manifestation of Divine Justice. A base and spiteful use had been made of the Act to attack the tenant, and a just use had been made of a technicality to balance matters to protect him.

But, this was a double-edged weapon, and the Committee of the War Rents League had many anxious meetings, discussing it in all its bearings before deciding their policy. At length we agreed that the plea of the non-service of a notice to quit should

never be used by us, excepting when the tenant was attacked by an unscrupulous landlord, in which case a tenant had a right to use any weapon available in his own defence. We saw clearly that this could be utilised as a deadly weapon of attack by large bodies of tenants throughout the country, and if so used it would inevitably lead to the detriment of all tenants.

If the increase according to the notice was correct, and the tenant had paid it, we held that he had approved of it, and that he had waived the notice to quit as a mere formality. Had he told the landlord when he received the notice that he would not pay the increase, he would have been presented with a notice to quit by the next post. But when he consented to pay the extra, there was no injustice in continuing to do so; whilst on the other hand, there was great injustice in claiming back more than a year's payment of rent from the landlord, especially as in some cases the landlord had paid away for rates, etc., the increases he had received. If the landlord were wrong in not serving notice to quit, the tenant was equally wrong in paying more rent without it, and it was impossible to prove that any injustice had been suffered on either side by the payment of the increases.

Many Trades and Labour Associations throughout the country wrote asking our views upon this new source of trouble, and they approved of the attitude we were taking, saying they only wanted to do what was fair. Many individual landlords and tenants also made inquiries, to all of whom we gave the same reply, coupled with the advice to talk matters over together and try to arrive at a

friendly understanding. The bulk of these letters came from places in the Midlands, between Derby and Nottingham, and were signs of much agitation upon the subject.

Passing through Whitehall one day, I met the private secretary to one of the Ministers, who asked me if I was aware that there was considerable trouble in the Midlands over the absence of notices to quit, and that there were eighteen summonses upon this point to be heard at Derby on the following Wednesday. I told him of the inquiries I had received, and I promised, as I was speaking at Sheffield on the Sunday, to break my journey and spend some days in the Midlands, and send a report of my investigations to the Prime Minister.

I looked up my correspondence, and started off next day to interview those who had written to me. I was never more surprised in my life to find that these terrible landlords were working men, and members of Trades and Labour Councils, and also energetic supporters of the Labour Party, some of them holding official positions.

They produced their books for my inspection, and after carefully checking their figures, I found they had treated their tenants with scrupulous fairness. The only fault they had committed was the neglect to serve a notice to quit, which they had refrained from doing, as they did not want to disturb their tenants, who had greatly resented the notices to quit that were given to them in 1916, shortly after the passing of the first Rent Act.

The increases of rent, which amounted in all to about 50 per cent. of the pre-war rent, had been paid with regularity for the last two years, when suddenly

they had received printed notices from a man living miles out of the district, stating that they had overcharged their tenants, who were now recovering the large sums he mentioned, by ceasing to pay anything for the next twelve months, but if the landlords chose to send him the amount named in full, he would give instructions to the tenants to pay them the pre-war rent in future. This man, whom I will call Maxwell, was going around from village to village, knocking at the doors of the cottages, and asking the tenants if their rent had been raised. When they said, "Yes," he asked whether they had previously received a notice to quit, to which they all answered, "No."

"Show me your rent books," he would then reply. "Yes, I thought so, your landlord has robbed you of £15 or £20. If you will give me your rent books, and stop paying any more rent until I tell you, and pay me ten shillings, I will get back for you all you have been swindled out of."

"I haven't ten shillings by me now," the woman might reply.

"Then give me half-a-crown, and pay me the same for the next three weeks, and I will get you the £15 or £20," he would reply. "If your landlord says anything to you about it, refer him to me, I will deal with him."

All of these landlords had received numbers of printed forms, which they had ignored because they were willing to talk matters over with their tenants, but not with this interloper, who was nothing to them. Eighteen summonses had been issued against them, and they were sure that their tenants were being forced to go on with them.

I obtained the tenants' names and addresses and I paid them a visit. None of them could tell me anything about their case, except that they had been robbed. None of them could show me any proof of this, for Maxwell had all their rent books and papers. All they could produce was a card indicating the payments of their half-crowns.

I found my way to Nottingham, and called upon Mr. A. W. Shelton, whom I had already proved to be the tenants' good friend, and I was amazed to discover, that he, himself, had also received a large packet of these printed forms declaring a rent strike, and that every other agent in the town was similarly favoured.

Maxwell was evidently a hustler. He seemed to be everywhere; making hay whilst the sun was shining. At ten shillings a printed form, he must have raked in several hundreds of pounds in a few weeks, far more than the War Rents League has had to carry on its work for ten years. Many lions had crossed my path, and I had begun to like meeting them. But Maxwell could hardly be classed as a lion; he was more of a budding millionaire, and as I had never met a millionaire in the making before, I was curious to become acquainted with him.

I heard he was in Stapleford, on Saturday afternoons, so I called upon a tenant in that village, who took me to a little schoolroom and introduced me to him. He was very busy, the hall being full of tenants paying in their half-crowns, but when he heard my name he received me with delight, thanking me for honouring him with a visit. I explained that I was on the way to Sheffield, and that I could not resist looking in upon him, and that I should like a quiet

word or two if he could spare a few minutes. We went out into the lane and leaned upon a red brick wall, where we talked.

"You seem to have a lot of trouble, here," I said.

"Trouble, my good fellow? Don't talk about it! I'm putting the landlords through it, all right! I'm mopping them up by thousands! I take one village at a time: I am nearly through with this, the next is Long Eaton," bubbled the mighty Maxwell.

"Good boy," I replied, slapping him on the back. "That's the stuff to give them! Now, tell me, what is it all about?"

Leaning close to me, and putting his hand to his mouth, he mysteriously whispered into my ear, "No notice to quit. That's one up against them, eh?"

"No notice to quit," I repeated thoughtfully. "That's a bit thin, isn't it? Surely you are not relying upon that? If you are, I am afraid you will find it a broken reed."

"You wait until Wednesday, and then I'll show you," he burst forth exultantly. "I've got a pet case at the Derby County Court that day, and we are asking for a definite decision about the notice to quit. It must go in our favour. The Judge cannot help himself. Then I am going to issue thousands of leaflets with the judgment in full. I'm going through Beeston into Nottingham one way, and through Long Eaton into Derby the other way, and up will go the blinking show. There won't be a tenant in the whole of the Midlands and the North of England in a month, who will pay any rent at all for a year or more."

"What you tell me is very serious, Maxwell," I replied. "Tell me, in whose interests are you

working, the tenant's or your own? I am afraid if you do what you say, that every tenant in England will suffer in the long run. Take my advice and withdraw those summonses from the County Court, and let us talk the matter over, and see if we cannot arrange things."

"I can't possibly do that," said he, taken aback by my reception of his wonderful revelation.

"Think it over," I suggested. "On Monday night, I am addressing a meeting of landlords and tenants in the Church Hall in this village, and I particularly want you to be there. I shall, I can see, find myself in some disagreement with you, and I do not want to say anything behind your back that I would not say to your face. I am entirely opposed to what you have just told me, and I shall not mince words in saying so. As all your tenants will be there, I think it is only right that you should come. The chair will be taken by the chairman of the Trades and Labour Council, and I will see that you have an opportunity of speaking."

"I am far too busy to come on Monday, as I have to go to several other villages that night," he replied.

"Can you meet me anywhere during the day on Monday?" I asked. "I shall be back from Sheffield at 2.30, and I can meet you in Nottingham at Such-a-hotel. I understand you have the rent books and papers of eighteen tenants" (and I noticed him open his eyes). "Bring those along with you. I don't want to have to inform the meeting that I came to Stapleford specially to invite you to it, and that after your great delight in meeting me you would not come. You don't know how glad I am to have

met you, Maxwell. I see no reason why we should not work together, yet."

On the Monday, Maxwell was waiting at the hotel when I arrived. After three hours and a half, during which I discussed the situation plainly with him, he decided that it was better for him to cancel all his engagements and accompany me to the meeting.

The hall was packed, not even standing room was available. I spoke for half an hour upon the duty of being fair, and I got the audience to agree that that was how they all wished to act. After presenting the case as viewed by the landlord, and then as viewed by some of the tenants, I appealed to them to arrange their difficulties amicably by submitting them to a tribunal composed of three from each side, with a neutral chairman.

The chairman then called upon Maxwell to speak. He was very worried and ill at ease. He felt that the meeting was with me in my appeal, and he also felt weighed down with the half-soverigns he had collected from the majority of the audience. He did not dare oppose my proposals, although he endeavoured to suggest opposition to them by introducing side issues. As he sat down he remarked to me, "You have placed me in a very difficult position." I knew he was alluding to his banking account, so I sympathetically replied, "That will be all right. I am here to help you through."

The chairman was timid. I had asked him to allow me to reply to Maxwell at once, so that I could clinch the argument; but he threw the meeting open, and immediately there arose a multitude of personal disputes between individual landlords and tenants

about drains, and grates, and roofs that leaked. Just as I was despairing about getting the meeting back to the note upon which it started, a garrulous old landlord began a long and involved story about some repairs, which became so ludicrous that the audience began to laugh. As I have often been accused of possessing an infectious laugh, I thought that this would be a good opportunity of putting it to some practical use, so I led the laughter from the platform, until the whole audience were in a good humour. I was then able to get in another little speech, showing that Maxwell had nothing to say against the formation of a tribunal, and suggesting that we had better get down to business at once.

Nobody seemed to be willing to move a resolution to that effect, and I did not feel that it was my place to do so. Once again the meeting looked as though it would be ineffective. Suddenly, the Vicar of Stapleford, who was standing near the door, stepped forward and supported me in a rousing speech, and concluded it with a resolution that all disputes about rents and houses should be settled by a committee, without having recourse to legal proceedings, which was enthusiastically received, only five voting against it in a meeting of five hundred.

At once I asked for the appointment of three landlords and three tenants to form the tribunal, and I prepared to make arrangements for the first meeting, to be held the following evening. I was introduced to Mr. J. P. Newton, a pleasant, jovial agent, who had come over from Long Eaton, and he came to my assistance and helped to smooth over many preliminary difficulties.

Maxwell was subdued; he could see his millions

going west; but he was still game and needed careful handling. He had missed his chance at the meeting, as he did not anticipate that his following would be so insignificant. If he had risen to the occasion by accepting all I had said, and had at once withdrawn the summonses, he would have run away with us, and the landlords would have been so pleased that he could have secured any number of concessions for the tenants. He was not thinking of them, however, so he missed his chance, and I knew that having missed that he would be dangerous.

The next morning I called upon the Vicar to thank him for his welcome support, and to ask permission to use his class room for the first meeting of the tribunal that evening. He invited us to come to his vicarage and he agreed to take the chair.

Soon after seven, we were seated round the Vicar's table. It was an interesting gathering; no outsider would have been able to distinguish landlords from tenants. They were all workmen; stolid, simple fellows with an instinctive desire to play the game. I had often heard talk of the class war; here it was in full swing, workers being incited to fight their fellows, all because they could not see that a legal right was not necessarily a moral right.

We soon got to business under the guidance of the Vicar, but Maxwell had a bad time in replying to his questions. He had to admit that he had acted as a bully towards the landlords, and that he had never attempted to look at the question from the landlords' point of view. He depended solely upon the non-service of the notice to quit, and he maintained that he was legally justified in all that he had done. He admitted that none of the tenants knew

the slightest details about the cases to be heard, and that he had prevented them from coming to terms with their landlords.

The Vicar drew up a document in which the three landlords and the three tenants agreed to constitute themselves into a tribunal for the settlement of the cases, together with a few preliminary rules of procedure, which they all signed; and the Vicar, Maxwell and myself signing as witnesses.

"Now," said the Vicar, "the corollary to this document is that all the cases in the County Court to-morrow shall be withdrawn." Maxwell, at once, shifted his ground. Now he was not responsible for any of the summonses. The tenants had taken them out, and they must be consulted before they could be withdrawn, otherwise they would have to pay the heavy legal expenses already incurred. He was afraid they would have to pay them in any case, and therefore he feared they would not consent to a withdrawal.

He had dangled the bag of easy money in the tenants' faces, and now he was prepared to bludgeon them over the head with it. There was a heated half-hour until he promised to instruct the solicitors to withdraw proceedings at the County Court next day.

At the door of the Derby County Court next morning, just as I was about to enter, Maxwell and his followers arrived in a huge char-a-banc. After lighting the fuse that was to "Bust up the Show," they were going to celebrate the occasion with a triumphal journey through the district, with a general call to "down" rent books, with denunciations of the Labour Party as traitors, and a firework display at night. I was announced to address a meeting,

under the auspices of the Labour Party at Long Eaton, that evening, and I foresaw some fun.

Having ascertained that the first of the eighteen cases in which I was interested, was the eleventh on the list for the day, I took a seat in Court and awaited events. The first case called chanced to be a rent case. After hearing the solicitors and evidence on both sides, the Judge suggested that they might come to some understanding. The solicitors whispered together and said they were afraid it was impossible. The Judge then asked them to go out of Court and talk it over, whilst he took the next case. When that case, concerning a mangle, was disposed of, up jumped the two solicitors with regrets that they could not arrive at a settlement, whereupon the Judge said he would adjourn the case for a month, so that they might have an opportunity of bringing their clients together.

The next case was also under the Rent Act, and was adjourned in the same way. Maxwell began to look anxious. He grew restless, and got up and went into the lobby to revive his spirits with a change of air. I slipped out after him, and I asked if he had given instructions for the actions to be withdrawn. Pale-faced and glaring like a fanatic, he sneered that he had nothing to do with them, they were out of his hands and rested with the tenants. I asked the usher to call out the tenant in our first case, and when he arrived I asked him whether he was willing to withdraw the case, as he could see from the Judge's attitude that he would be told to try to come to an agreement with his landlord. "I'm quite willing to do so, if Maxwell will let me," he replied. I then had the solicitor sent for. He

was at a loss to know who was his client. I showed him the agreement to form a tribunal to deal with these cases signed by Maxwell a few hours before, and I told him of Maxwell's promise to withdraw the cases that morning, and at the same time I pointed out that his real client was willing to agree to this. Some very warm language was indulged in, in that lobby, but I managed to keep cool as I accidentally knocked a fire bucket over myself, in giving expression to my opinion of Maxwell, and among other things I promised to knock the nails into his coffin at Long Eaton that evening.

When our cases were reached, to the surprise of us all, the tenants' solicitor asked that the whole of the eighteen might be adjourned for a month, as there was a desire upon both sides to come to a settlement, and the Judge beamed down upon him and wished him success in his efforts.

There was now a clear month in which to establish peace and goodwill among these little people, and in order to inaugurate the birth of a new spirit, Mr. J. P. Newton, of Long Eaton, who had no part in these disputes, invited Maxwell, his solicitor and all the landlords and tenants to lunch with him at the Royal Hotel. We had a pleasant time, and we all parted with friendly feelings eager to patch up our differences.

When I entered the magnificent Co-operative Hall at Long Eaton that evening, there was not an empty seat. The chairman of the meeting was the Chairman of the District Council, and also of the Trades and Labour Council, and he opened the proceedings by stating that the Labour Party stood for fair play all round.

As I rose to speak, I was met with discordant yells

and hisses from the people in the three front rows, and then I perceived that Maxwell was in their midst, inciting them to disturb the meeting. His triumphant procession through the villages had not come off, and his firework display had fizzled out into shouting vile epithets, and spitting like serpents, at me. It seemed that after enjoying Mr. Newton's hospitality he had hurried away and collected a rabble of dirty, snaggy toothed people, and had brought them some miles by train in order to prevent an exposure of himself in Long Eaton, the next Tom Tiddler's ground upon his list. This opposition set me ablaze, and the interruptions thrown at me added new sparks to the flames, so that I burned brightly for two hours, and the resolution was carried with only the opposition of the three front rows.

As I was leaving the platform I was approached by a dear little old lady, who grasped both my hands and would not let them go, until she had thanked me many times, and told me her story. She was a widow, and her husband had been a railway worker. When they were first married, she and her husband had bought with their savings the house in which she lived. He was a steady man, and as the four adjacent houses were put up for sale, he bought them one at a time upon a mortgage. These houses represented all his savings, and when he died a part of the mortgage remained to be paid off. They were pretty little houses, let before the war at five shillings a week, that included rates, and when she had paid the rates and interest, she received three shillings a week from each; so that at the beginning of the war she had a house to live in, and twelve shillings a week to keep her and to pay the rates upon her own house.

As the war progressed, and the purchasing power of her twelve shillings decreased, she had some difficulty in making ends meet. When the 1920 Act was passed, her agent sent notices of increase to her tenants, making their rents seven and sixpence a week; but this did not mean an increase of income to her, as the increase in the rates and mortgage interest, and some necessary repairs she had had to do to two of the houses to satisfy the mortgagee, only just balanced the increase of rent. When I verified her statements at the agent's next day, I found her income was only eleven shillings a week, but out of compassion the agent paid her twelve shillings as he had formerly done.

First one tenant stopped paying rent, and then the whole of the four. Her income had ceased suddenly, the rate authorities were threatening to sell up her home to pay the rates upon the houses, and the mortgagee was talking of foreclosing. Ruin stared her in the face, and all because she had not given her tenants, who were in full work and in full health, a notice to quit, two years previously, which at the best was a scrap of paper, that she could not have enforced.

Maxwell desperately fought on for his coveted millions, but the delay at Derby prevented the spread of his pernicious propaganda, as all the best tenants shunned him. He prevented the tribunal from functioning, however, and months afterwards when he secured a verdict from the Court, he found it too late to fan the flames of revolution, as he was opposed everywhere by a combination of landlords and tenants, who tied his hands with notices to appeal. He was finally snuffed out by a Sanitary Inspector as a nuisance and annoyance to the community.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE WORKING-CLASS WAR

MY first business on reaching London was to draw up a report and send it to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and also to the landlords' associations, asking that immediate action should be taken to stop the abuse of the Act in this way, and to prevent the possibility of a recurrence in other parts of the country. Mr. Edwin Evans, Mr. A. W. Shelton and I had many deputations to the Ministry of Health, where Sir Aubrey Symonds, the Permanent Secretary, devoted much time and trouble to discussing a workable plan for dealing with this danger.

The situation was fully realised by the Ministry, as Sir Alfred Mond, the Minister of Health, presented a memorandum to the Cabinet advising action, yet in spite of this, things were allowed to drift and nothing was done.

The next move came from Scotland, where a Sheriff decided, in what is the now celebrated "Kerr v. Bride" case, that no increases were legal unless a notice to quit had been previously served to terminate the tenancy, and that the tenant was entitled to recover all the increases he had paid since August, 1920.

An appeal was made to the House of Lords, and after hearing arguments for several days, the Lords adjourned to consider their decision, and it was not until five months afterwards that that decision was made known, in the midst of the Election of Novem-

ber, 1922, and a few days before the date of the poll. Three Lords of Appeal were in favour of a notice to quit being necessary before an increase of rent could be legally made, whilst two Law Lords took the opposite view. This was exceptionally hard upon the Scottish Landlords who had acted in good faith, under advice from the Scottish Office, in not serving the notices to quit. There was no ulterior motive in not serving them; they did not benefit in any way by not doing so, and the tenant was not harmed through not receiving them.

The effect upon the tenants in parts of Glasgow and Clydesdale was startling. The Labour candidates, contesting those constituencies, immediately issued circulars promising that tenants would be able to live rent free for twelve months if they voted for them. And, of course, the tenants responded in a body, and these candidates were elected with sweeping majorities.

Here was a rent strike legalised by the highest court of law in the land. It was welcomed by every element that desired trouble. The English sympathisers with this action endeavoured to stir up every tenant to follow the Scottish example, so as to extend the strike throughout the land, in order to bankrupt the landlords and to give effect to their war cry, "to bust up the show."

As usual, these trouble-mongers were extremely short-sighted. They had no intimate knowledge of the situation, and instead of damaging the big capitalists, with whom they were at war, they injured their own people.

In London, and in most of the big towns, the property owners had served notices to quit to their

tenants, and so that there should be no mistake about it, they had even printed it upon their increase of rent forms, not that they thought such a notice was necessary, but they were not taking any risks. It was only the little landlord, the workman with a house or two, who had neglected to take this precaution.

The term "landlord" was not, however confined by its definition to the owner of a house. It included also a tenant who had sub-let some of his rooms, as he stood in relation to his tenant in the same position as his landlord did in relation to him.

Now, very few tenants served their sub-tenants with notices to quit, and as a fact, they rarely served notices of increase of rent upon them. Their usual method was to show their own notices to them and arrange between themselves how much more they should pay for their rooms.

Therefore, directly this no-rent agitation was wildly launched in London, a most sickening exhibition of the class war was let loose upon us. Tenants and sub-tenants were flying at each others' throats, everywhere. The spirit of greed, that they had condemned among the house speculators, was commended by a section of the tenants now that opportunity served their purpose. Mrs. Brown recovered £20 and bought a new rig-out, therefore Mrs. Jones, next door, felt she was also entitled to new furs and feathers, and Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Robinson, being assured that it was quite legal and quite safe, followed in their train.

The tenants were often in poorer circumstances than their lodgers, but that made no difference the law must be pressed to the very uttermost.

Lawyers and societies sprang up on all hands eager to participate in the spoils. The costs upon some of these cases amounted to as much as £30, and lawyers were not backward in putting in executions for them, and selling up the tenants' homes. And all this was the result of the tenant trying to act decently to his lodger; and just because he had made a technical slip, some mad politicians imagined it might be used as a profitable political stunt.

If ever the tenant needed protection, it was now, not only from his landlord, but from his fellow workman as well. Some landlords were not slow in seeing the possibilities of serving their own ends by getting the tenant out, and they quietly encouraged and assisted the lodgers to attack. Many tenants fled from their houses, not being able to sustain a battle on both sides.

I have had many weeping inquirers come to consult me but never have I had so many as during this period. The outrageous bills of costs, and their consequences, were out of all proportion to the issues involved. The injustice of it was almost unthinkable.

Our work was now extended to saving the pots and pans, and whilst this storm raged we were able to save over fifty little homes, and successfully fought many interpleader actions.

One glaring anomaly was brought to light through these cases. If a tenant's rooms became empty and they were re-let, and if the rent of them had not been increased, they could not be re-let at the rent including the permitted increases, unless the new lodger was let into them at the former rent, and after taking possession he was served with a notice to quit, and a

notice of increase under the Act was given. Most tenants thought that if they charged for new lettings the amount indicated upon the schedules issued by the local councils, they had done their duty to their neighbour and themselves.

The following is an instance of what occurred. A pleasant little woman was sent to me one day from the Clerkenwell County Court. She was the mother of five small children. Her husband had been to the war, but since his return he had taken up with another woman, and he had been ordered by the Court to pay his wife one pound a week for maintenance. With this, which she received spasmodically, and with the charing work she did around the neighbourhood, she managed to live and keep her children; and to assist her to pay the rent she let the rooms on the first and second floors, living herself in the semi-basements. The pre-war rent of each floor was nine shillings a week, but that rent, in 1920, could be increased to fourteen shillings a week.

At the end of 1920 the first floor became vacant. A smartly dressed young woman called, and looked over the rooms and offered to take them, saying she would pay one pound a week. The landlady replied that fourteen shillings was the legal rent, and that she did not wish for more. The young woman said her husband could well afford one pound, but the woman would not be tempted and refused to accept more than fourteen shillings. A few months later, the top floor tenants left, and the young woman asked that the rooms might be let to a friend of hers, an American, who could well afford twenty-five shillings a week. Again the landlady replied that fourteen shillings was all the Town Hall said she could charge, and

the rooms were accordingly let to the American at that figure.

Two years went by, during which everyone was contented, when one day the man on the first floor conceived an idea of starting as a window cleaning contractor, and he told the landlady that he was going to place his truck and ladders in her area, and affix a notice board to the front of the house. She refused to permit this as the house was let as a private dwelling house, and she would get into trouble with her landlord. He persisted, however, and when he placed the truck and ladders in her area, she threw them into the street, and tore the notice board down. He retaliated by telling her that he had ascertained that his rent should only be nine shillings a week, and that he had overpaid her about £30, so she must not expect any more rent until this amount had been worked off, which would take over a year to recover. And what was more, his friend on the floor above would also refrain from paying rent for the same reason. The landlady was distracted; she relied upon their rents to pay her rates. Not being able to meet the rate demand of something over eight pounds, she was committed to Holloway Prison for three weeks, and the five children were taken to the workhouse. It costs one pound five shillings a week to keep a child in a Poor Law Institution, and it was estimated that it cost the country twenty-six pounds for the three weeks' disturbance of this family, to which must be added the eight pounds odd for rates, which imprisonment wiped out, and thus became a loss to the district.

Upon leaving the prison, she issued a summons against her lodgers for the rent owing. The Judge

was very sympathetic, but he said, as they were within their legal rights, he was powerless to help her. She broke down in Court, when she told of her imprisonment, and she was referred to me to see if I could assist her in any way.

I found that the lodgers had been represented by a firm of solicitors, so I called upon them and told them I was investigating the case, and that I proposed sending a full report of my inquiries to the Judge, who was distressed at the way this woman was being treated. They evidently did not like the matter either, and they suggested that I had better talk it over with their clients.

When I met the window cleaner, I was surprised to find him such a well spoken man. He said he had been induced to act in the way he had, by her refusal to allow him to store his ladders, but he never realised that it would have led to her imprisonment. He had now secured premises from which he could carry on his business, and he and his friend would remove there in three weeks.

Before the three weeks were up, another lot of rates had to be paid, and once more the landlady was taken to Holloway Prison. It was upon this occasion that I pleaded with the Mayor to remit the rates, but in vain. He preferred to cost the country another thirty-four pounds. Upon this occasion the woman had a pleasant time in prison; she was in the infirmary, and had for her companions Mrs. John Scurr, and the other Guardians from Poplar, who were serenaded every evening with bands of music. Regularly every Sunday she received a visit from a clergyman in Islington, against whom a committal order for non-payment of rates was made, who was

unable to leave his house with safety upon any other day of the week.

Something had to be done to stop such injustices, and the first start was for the new Government to bring in a Bill to regularise increases made without notices to quit being previously given. This Bill received our support and became law on June 7th, 1923.

CHAPTER XXXIII

REPAIRS

THE vexed question of repairs demands special treatment. It has been a disturbing element in connection with every phase of our post-war housing difficulty.

During the years of the war, tenants generally were most considerate in their requirements in this respect. Although a large number of their houses were always in an indifferent state of repair, they did not complain of anything out of the way, as they fully realised the difficulties in obtaining both labour and material.

But as soon as the war was over, and there were plenty of handy men requiring work, they expected that their homes would be made habitable, and the majority of tenants were not disposed to grumble at an increase of 40 per cent., if they received the convenience and comfort for which they were paying.

With many owners there was never the slightest intention of expending a penny of this increase for the benefit of the tenants. They regarded it as an additional amount of profit which they preferred to capitalise by selling the house at a price based upon the increased return. There was no incentive for them to spend anything upon their property, as they were able to sell even in disrepair at far more than they gave, and they scornfully told their tenants, that they were out to get all they could, and to do nothing in return.

Naturally this attitude created some bad feeling. Parliament had foreseen that difficulty might arise, and as a safeguard it had conferred upon the County Court power to suspend the increases if the Sanitary

Authority certified that the house was not in a reasonable state of repair, or was not fit for human habitation.

It was extremely dangerous for the tenant, if the house was declared not to be fit for human habitation, as the landlord would at once apply for a closing order, and turn out the tenant without any ceremony. Some landlords of neglected property, and there are some men who deal in nothing else, have revelled in this loophole which was inserted in one of the many recent Housing Acts, and Co-operative Societies have not been backward in clearing such property in this way for the extension of their businesses. In other cases, as soon as the tenant was thrown out, the house would be let to somebody who would repair it, or else it would be sold.

To obtain a certificate certifying the house not to be in a reasonable state of repair was by no means an easy matter, although it was obvious to everyone that as the majority of houses had had nothing done to them since the beginning of the war, they must nearly all of them answer to this description. No tenant was so unreasonable as to expect his house to be done up thoroughly from top to bottom, but he did expect to be able to go to bed and not wake up in a pool of water, to light a fire without being suffocated with smoke, and also to have a grate that would cook his food. These things, with a room or two in constant use that needed to be papered and white-washed, were the utmost of his requirements. When these moderate repairs, for which the tenant was paying nearly half as much rent again, were refused, it is no wonder that some feeling prevailed.

This feeling was intensified by the attitude of the

Public Health Committees, who control the work of the Sanitary Inspector. I firmly believe that the Sanitary Inspectors would have administered the Act fairly if they had been given a free hand, all of them being anxious that their districts shall do them credit. But the Public Health Committees are elected bodies that have a peculiar tendency to attract members, who are financially interested in house property in its many ramifications, and the Sanitary Inspector is in many matters subject to their instructions.

These Committees decided that nothing could be certified in the way of repairs, except what the Public Health Acts enabled them to compel the landlord to execute. They were reticent in granting certificates even to this limited extent, not wishing to put the landlords to expense. To some owners this expenditure might be a serious matter, and many Committees, when a complaint was made, refused to issue a certificate until they had first notified the landlord and given him a chance of attending to the most necessary defects.

Even when a certificate was granted, the Public Health Act ruled the wording. The landlord was informed that he would be required to cleanse the ceilings and to strip the walls, and Sanitary Authorities would say, and say truthfully, that they had no power to whitewash the ceiling after water-washing it, nor to re-paper the walls after stripping them. The result was that the tenants were certainly left with a cleaner room, but not one that could be called in a reasonable state of repair, as the walls and the ceilings were abominable to behold, and would not have been tolerated even in our prisons and work-houses.

"That's what you get for going to the Sanitary Inspector," tenants would be told.

Some would carry it a step further and say, "Now I am going to distemper your walls with the vilest colour I can find, just to show you who is master. If I cannot drive you out one way, then I will another way."

Every time I met with an instance that was scandalous enough to justify exposure in Court, in order to obtain a judicial decision upon the question of a reasonable state of repair, the agent or owner scented danger, and gave way, and finished the work satisfactorily.

This impression of helplessness is widely disseminated by Sanitary Authorities, and it is with difficulty that certificates can be obtained. One tenant, I know, wrote four times and sent his shilling, which was confiscated every time, but finally he composed a poem of twenty verses, and his description of his damp walls upon which he said the seaweed grew, so impressed the Sanitary Inspector that he gave a certificate at once.

The certificate under the Rent Act has nothing at all to do with the Public Health Acts. The schedule of repairs should contain everything that renders the house not in a reasonable state of repair, whether these repairs can be enforced or not. This certificate is to safeguard the tenant against having to pay an increase for repairs when nothing is done, and nothing is intended to be done. It is a notice to the landlord that if he likes to remedy the defects he can collect forty per cent. more rent, but if he does not wish to put his house in order, he cannot obtain more rent than at the beginning of the war. He has

the choice, and it rests with him what he does about it.

Lord Onslow's Committee took this view in its report upon the Rent Act, and Lord Eustace Percy also gave a clear explanation of it upon these lines before the Committee of the House of Commons. Special Committees can be formed by local councils for dealing with the Rent Act and these certificates, but as far as I have been able to ascertain nothing has been done to change the procedure I have described.

If local councils would do their duty in this respect, there would be far less trouble and irritation among landlords and tenants. Many a man would say to his landlord, if he got a certificate, "I don't want you to put the place in order unless you like. If you don't do it, you will receive less rent, and I shall spend what I would have given you in making the house comfortable for myself. I do not see paying it to you, and being then left in discomfort."

CHAPTER XXXIV

LATER LEGISLATION

BEFORE the passing of the Notice to Quit Amending Act in 1923, many adventures were experienced. My office in Fleet Street had to be given up, as it became too popular. When five hundred poor applicants for advice flocked around my door in a day, several times a week, and it became necessary for the police to preserve order, for the sake of my neighbours, I had to move on once more. But move succeeded move, to Victoria, to Shaftesbury Avenue, and to Bloomsbury; yet the crowds still followed me, and as every individual was in dire distress and almost frantic with fear, I had all my work cut out to cope with them. At last my wife again came to the rescue, and suggested that I should interview applicants at home by appointment. This also solved another trouble, as the contributions made to assist our work were barely enough to pay the office rent.

Early in 1923, three members of Parliament resigned in order that Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawan, and two members of the Stanley family might obtain seats, and elections were fought in East Willesden, Liverpool and Mitcham, the chief issue being whether the Rent Act should be continued and middle-class houses still remain under control.

Mr. Chuter Ede, at Mitcham, defeated the proposed Minister of Health, who was never certain of his policy upon the Rent Act two days running. Mr. Ede proved a most valuable representative in the tenants' interests in the House of Commons, and

added serious and informative contributions to the debates.

The War Rents League concentrated its energies during this election in East Willesden, on behalf of Mr. Harcourt Johnstone, who received the support of tenants of all parties on account of his clear and definite policy of "Houses before decontrol." It was a hard fought contest, and the whole of our Committee threw themselves into the fight. But the credit of the victory was largely due to Mr. Walter Isaac, who conducted Mr. Johnstone's campaign.

I had never seen Mr. Walter Isaac in action before, although I had known and admired him for years as an ardent housing reformer, and one who understood the tenants' difficulties, and I had often lectured at his invitation. It was, however, a joy to see him calmly and cheerfully directing operations, without fuss or flurry, supported by his equally cool and collected colleague of the London Liberal Federation, Mr. J. Manus. Lucky was the candidate that had such a pair of happy warriors to assist him. And When Mr. Harcourt Johnstone took his seat for East Willesden, he fully justified in the House of Commons, all the hopes and expectations of those who had worked on his behalf.

The extremists' action in using the Rent Act as a weapon of attack was to bear fruit at last. In June, 1923, the Conservative Government brought in almost at the last moment before the Rent Act expired, a Bill to extend and amend it. The whole nature of the Act was altered. Its object was not to protect the homes of tenants until sufficient houses were built for the people's needs, but to enhance the profits of house owners and house builders by grant-

ing greater facilities for obtaining possession and to bring pressure upon tenants to purchase the old houses in which they were living. To create an incentive for them to buy, the house was to slip out of control immediately, and they were to be allowed to let any rooms that came into their possession at any price they could obtain. The reward of thrift was to be the power to squeeze a rack rent out of the necessitous occupiers of attics and basements. The several measures foreshadowed by Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen to decontrol horizontally, that was to decontrol the houses over a rateable value of £70 a year, as a start, would have caused far less distress than the Government plan to decontrol vertically, *i.e.*, at any value, because this method took houses of every description, even those occupied by the poorest, outside the protection of the Act at once, and gave encouragement to the displacement of tenants so that decontrol could be accelerated. At the same time the tenants' only safeguard of alternative accommodation was taken away, and the landlord was given additional opportunities of getting possession for his sons and daughters. It was a gift with both hands to the speculator and the profiteer, and it was opposed by members of all parties. Mr. Sidney Webb, Mr. Rhys Davies, Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Mardy Jones, and Mr. Chuter Ede for the Labour Party, and Mr. Trevelyan Thomson, Mr. Isaac Foot, Mr. Wedgwood Benn, and Mr. E. J. Harney for the Liberals, brilliantly argued the tenants' case, whilst many Conservatives showed their disapproval of the measure by refusing to have anything to do with it. Mr. G. W. H. Jones, the Member for Stoke Newington, who alone among the

supporters of the Government had practical knowledge of the tenants' troubles, brought down the wrath of the Ministers upon him for his outspoken criticism of the Bill; and Mr. Oswald Mosley was delightfully ironical at their expense.

It was not long, however, before the prophecies made by the Liberal lawyers came true—namely, that the Act gave the tenant no protection whatever. New Judges and deputy Judges seem to have been appointed at the time of this Act coming into force. I have no doubt but that they interpreted the Act strictly, but they did not temper their justice with mercy, as the older Judges, who had behind them ten years of this legislation, endeavoured to do within the limits imposed upon them.

No tenant stood a chance, if the landlord said he suffered hardship by not getting possession of his house. Judges declared that they could not take the tenants' circumstances into consideration at all. I should never have believed that the law was so harsh if I had not witnessed the cases myself. Two old people and their daughter were turned into the street because a spinster, who was living with her sister and had been with her for twelve years, said she wanted the five roomed house. A man and wife and two children were ejected because a foreigner wanted the rooms to turn into a school for typewriting. A woman and three children and her sister were ordered to leave their four rooms for a newly married woman, who had three rooms and a bathroom vacant in the house, but said she could not afford to live in those rooms because she could get £150 a year by letting them.

Profiteering tenants now saw a golden oppor-

tunity. They had crowded into a few rooms in order to let the remainder at an exorbitant rent. As soon as their lodger complained about the amount he was being charged, they would rush off to the Court with a plea that the rooms were wanted for their son or daughter. When the tenant was turned out, in order to avoid being fined for letting the same rooms again, they would shift their furniture into those rooms, and let the rooms they formerly lived in for the exorbitant rent they had been obtaining.

There was no holding the situation. The test of hardship once more brought out the imaginative qualities of landlords and landladies. There were more varicose veins and palpitating hearts in England than ever before. I remember being in the Epsom County Court one day, where a solicitor had a pile of cases, and every old landlady would crawl into the witness box, and have to be accommodated with a seat as she was so bad, and after feebly telling her story because her breath was so short, she would succeed in getting an order against her tenant. The Judge little knew what a miracle worker he was, for as soon as these old women got outside the Court, they recovered at once. One of them who said she could not walk on account of veins danced a foxtrot as soon as she got outside, and rushed around among her friends saying, "I told you I would work it."

Many of the Judges did not like turning families out, and they openly said they would welcome an appeal against what they considered to be the only interpretation they could place upon the Act.

Omnibus men once more seemed to be attacked in numbers, and those of Willesden and Cricklewood got little mercy from the County Court in their dis-

trict. A deputation from their Trade Union waited upon Mr. Harcourt Johnstone, and he promised to support an appeal if they could find him a case. Before one could be discovered that was clean cut, dealing with the question whether the tenant's circumstances and his inability to find another place were to be taken into consideration before an order for his ejectment was made, another election took place.

The Labour Party now assumed office, and we all felt that we should have this great wrong righted. Ben Gardiner, M.P. for the Upton Division of Essex, was successful, in the ballot for Bills, in obtaining second place. Immediately, he put forward an amending Rent Bill, dealing with all the points that were causing trouble and distress among the tenants of the country. It gave opportunity for discussion of every grievance, and if it had been given a fair chance, it could have been amended and would have been a very useful piece of legislation. But from the first the Conservative opposition was determined that it should not emerge from the Committee. For weeks, amendments adding words to the first clause were discussed, and amendments, and amendments to amendments were moved by the opposition and their friends in order that no progress should be made. The Liberals were most anxious that something should be done, as evictions were still taking place all over the country, and many of the Labour Members were as keenly concerned. One felt sorry for Mr. Mardy Jones and Mr. Arthur Greenwood, who were doing their best to assist the suffering people. But their hands were tied by the extremists, who wanted the opposition to continue their ob-

struction, which they thought would be a lesson to the country.

Over 48,000 evictions had been ordered in the County Courts and Police Courts in six months, and the numbers were increasing. This made no impression upon the extremists, who welcomed the news.

Everybody expected that an opposition would oppose, so there was no object in being held up just to demonstrate that obvious fact, if a way could be found to help the tenants. Mr. Harcourt Johnstone moved the adjournment of the Committee as a protest because the Government would not declare its hand. Then Mr. E. D. Simon, M.P. for Withington, produced a Bill to deal with obtaining possession, to take away the claims for sons and daughters of landlords, and to make alternative accommodation once more a necessity before an order could be granted. But the Government from which so much had been expected wobbled, and did not know its own mind. Its extreme section wanted to do impossibilities, and landed itself and the Government into difficulty after difficulty.

At length we found a case which Mr. Harcourt Johnstone took to the Court of Appeal, and the Judges there spoke strongly about the practice in the County Courts of ignoring the tenants' circumstances. Up to now, this was the most practical assistance that tenants had received. We felt sure of getting the Government's help in passing Mr. E. D. Simon's Bill. But when the help came, it was found that the clause was cut down so much that it did not go any further than the appeal decision obtained by Mr. Harcourt Johnstone. The Labour Party were so jealous of

the Liberals that they would not even accept the wording of their Bill, but preferred to cut it down to meet the wishes of the Conservative opposition. There was a great fight over putting in a date after which alternative accommodation was to be a condition precedent of any order being made. This was one of the most important points in the Bill, as it checked the continuance of the disturbance of tenants by the selling of houses over their heads. Finally the Government gave way and the Bill was passed, after some difference with the House of Lords.

The trouble was not yet over, as a fortnight passed without the Bill being printed, and the advantage that the tenant might have received, by having the judgments against him revised in the light of the new measure, was thus being taken away, especially as the Courts were rising for vacation and some of them did not sit again for six weeks.

Again the assistance of the Member for East Willesden had to be sought, and he not only succeeded in getting copies of the Act circulated, but he also secured the tenant by getting the Lord Chancellor to make an order, whereby application could be made to the Registrar of the Court, in the Judge's absence, to stay the execution of the warrants for ejectment.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE NEXT MOVE

MY ten years adventures have now run their course. Ten years of incessant hard work, and yet of great joy; filled with tears and laughter; lighted with gleams of the saintliness and nobility of human nature, and darkened at times with the baseness of inhuman greed. Ten happy years in the Master's service, protecting the least of these His brethren, and casting out the money changers from the holy places—the tenants' homes. This work, which came to me unsought, was a privilege conferred upon me, which I have striven not to abuse. I am conscious that more and better work might have been done. I have always tried to touch the imagination and the conscience of those who sought my advice, and I am painfully aware that many were too absorbed in their own troubles to respond to my appeals to help others.

The spirit of fellowship and co-operation, so notable during the dark days of the war, evidently did not spring from a feeling of consideration for others, but from fear for one's own self. Otherwise the promises, then made in good faith for the reconstruction of the country upon a better basis, would not have been abandoned, as they have been by those who held the power.

To-day the same sense of fear is the dominant factor in our troubles. It is not, however, controlled and organised for a national purpose as then, but is

allowed to run loose in the interests of private profit, every man being encouraged to get the better of his fellows.

Instead of a well-ordered system controlling financiers, builders' merchants, and builders, employing the thousands of munition workers and ex-service men to make up the shortage of houses due to the prohibition of building during the war, and allocating these houses to the men who have fought for their homes and lost them, upon terms, whereby, in a few years they might become owners of them, hardly anything has been done. For six years nothing has been done for the heroes to whom the country pledged itself to supply homes. Millions of public money have been paid out in unemployment allowances, which might have been utilised for the production of houses.

Six years have been wasted in allowing every private interest to run wild, and to hold up every scheme put forward by successive Governments, so that the profit-monger shall be protected from any form of restriction or control.

It may be said that a number of houses have been built, and that a number more are approved; but the overwhelming majority of these are for sale, and they do not touch a fringe of the problem that confronts us. The Minister of Health has stated that every 25,000 new houses built releases 25,000 old houses to let. He may be told this, but it is not so. More profit can be made by selling the old houses than by selling new ones, and he will find plenty of old houses in every district standing empty for sale.

With all the building that has been done since the

war, not one additional residence has been added to those then in existence. Houses are daily being closed as uninhabitable and the tenants are in the workhouses being kept by the Poor Rate; tenants are being turned out of living rooms which are then let for offices and workshops. Business firms have bought up hundreds of houses and converted them into shops and store rooms. At this moment, one large firm is trying to turn out the tenants of a large block of middle-class flats in order to extend their business premises. And yet the Government permits this; it does not even require them to replace the dwellings they destroy by forcing them to build others. Amid the misery that is being suffered on every hand through the shortage, it permits thousands of houses to stand empty continuously without even compelling the owners to pay anything towards the local and the imperial taxes. For an anti-social act the reward is freedom from taxation, the cost of which is cast upon the backs of those who suffer from the deprivation of this accommodation. It cannot be a real Government that permits such liberty. There must be some power that governs the Government and that prevents it from exercising Government control.

At this rate, the shortage will never be made up. If, for every dwelling built, two are taken away, it is like taking one step forward and two backward. Can this be the Great Push after the war, which politicians were preparing for? Is it any wonder that people are saying that there is no intention to cure the shortage?

If there is such a desire, this leakage must be stopped at every outlet. No more houses must

be knocked down to find employment by building main roads or post offices and the like; no more country cottages must be sold to week-enders and the labourers turned adrift; no more little houses must be converted into garages, unless those wishing to do these things are prepared to furnish the community with a *quid pro quo*.

The sitting tenants should be more adequately protected than they are at present. There is no housing difficulty with them, unless they could do with more room, and if any one buys their house over their heads, he should not be allowed to disturb them. If he wants a house let him buy a new one, and thus assist the country in getting a larger supply.

No more houses should be allowed to go out of control. If the present Act is continued, as the Government promises, some check should be exercised over the decontrolled rents that can be charged. During the existence of this Act a most dangerous condition of affairs has arisen. The exorbitant rents demanded for rooms is leading to a terrible state of overcrowding, among a class of people that have never been subjected to it before. When rents were restricted no rooms were to be let where the parents had children. Now that any rent can be asked, the more children the higher the rent. Families turned out of two rooms for overcrowding are now forced to squeeze into one room, and the rent of that one room double what they paid for two. Aliens have turned to house purchasing as being the one sure gamble. They let out every room in the house except one in which they live, and they demand six months rent down as a premium. Seven and eight times

the pre-war rent is being obtained from these places. And the County Courts and Police Courts supply them with applicants, who are driven to accept anything, at any terms, in order to provide some shelter for themselves and their families.

The self-respecting classes are gradually having all their self-respect squeezed out of them. They smile at the long debates in Parliament about having parlours in the new houses yet to be built, whilst they have to put up with a scullery-kitchen-dining-room-parlour all in one during the day, which is converted into a bedroom for their eldest boy at night, and for this accommodation they have to pay more than they did for an eight-roomed house even with the increases added. There is a great and growing contempt for Parliament and the Law. These people are a long suffering people, and those who have been accustomed to a decent standard of living, and are now being brought down to degradation by the folly and fear of politicians, will be dangerous customers when they awake.

Parliament is directly responsible for this state of affairs. Its policy of decontrol is building up new slums. To talk of clearing the old slum areas and rehousing the poorest of the poor at a time when they say they cannot build houses for the higher class of workers at rents they can afford, looks like trying to burke the greatest problem before us, to maintain the decent homes that still exist. To the wealthy man who has as many houses as he wants, and when he does not want one, he can hop about from hotel to hotel, as a bird upon a twig, this sounds good; but it sounds much better to the house-jobber and the house-farmer, who realise that these grand

schemes will take all the money that can be raised, and that no other dwellings can be built to enter into competition with theirs.

County Councils and other local authorities should put into force without delay all the powers they have under the many Building Acts. If they are held up by merchants or builders, they should take the work into their own hands, and if there is not sufficient labour, they should train their own men. If an earnest effort were made many of the difficulties would soon disappear. The great interest is the housing interests of the people before which all the other interests should be made to bow. Kensington has just taken a lead by announcing that it is disgusted with the housing conditions in its Royal Borough, and it is advocating, that as economies have been effected in the rates, its citizens should agree to pay 4d. in the £ to raise a fund for erecting houses for those most in need.

As I have shown in my narrative, this is no party question. I have had the support and assistance of men of all parties and none. It is a pity that Parliament should deal with it as a party issue. There are in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, men of goodwill, representing every phase of opinion, who are seriously impressed with the importance of finding some way out of the muddle into which this matter has drifted. If they could get together I am sure that their pronouncement upon this question would give a lead to the Government. An attempt has been made in London by the formation of a London Housing League, to elevate this subject above all others as the one issue at the County Council elections. If the same attitude was fol-

lowed by our legislators, it would give greater confidence throughout the country, and give encouragement to those who are tired of this important matter being used for party ends.

Until there are sufficient houses to let for the people, it is most necessary that the Rent Act should remain in force. As at present constituted it gives rise to all the many difficulties I have tried to illustrate. It has become so complex that it is now almost unworkable. Judges are always admitting that they cannot understand it, because its many different interpretations make parts of it nonsensical. And the procedure in the County Courts connected with these disputes has become so technical that neither landlord nor tenant receives satisfaction. They may receive a legal decision, but that is usually too generous to one and too hard upon the other.

The many questions raised could be much better dealt with by a lay tribunal, which was not subjected to the strict rules of evidence, but which by means of investigation could obtain a better idea of the difficulties, and by arrangement could effect settlements which would be more just to both parties.

The Jews have in the East End of London, a Court named the Beth Din (The House of Justice), presided over by the Rabbi and two assessors. It has been my privilege to be invited there upon several occasions, and I greatly admire the manner in which it is conducted. It sits every day, mostly in the evening so that it shall not interfere with the man's work, and there are no fees to pay, and no lawyers to engage.

After the plaintiff and the defendant have told their respective stories, the Rabbi asks them ques-

tions in order to clear up doubts, and then he tries to bring them to some common understanding. If it is a matter of rent, he enquires into all the figures of the rent of the house, and if the sub-tenant is paying more than a fair proportion of that, he presents the case vividly to the landlord, suggesting that he shall reduce the amount. The landlord makes a reduction, which is put up to the tenant, who names an amount that he thinks fair and that he is prepared to pay. Again the landlord considers it, being guided by the Rabbi, and finally a rent is agreed upon, and they both sign their names to the settlement in a large book, and go out together the best of friends, and cement the friendship with a drink.

This is very different from the exit from the County Court, where they swear to get even with one another before long.

Again, the Quakers settle all disputes between their members in a similar way. But in both of these instances there is a strong religious sanction.

I feel that in time as strong a civic sanction would operate, if lay tribunals were formed at every Town Hall or Council Office, where tenants and landlords could bring their housing grievances, and air them before a representative for the tenants and one for the landlords with an impartial chairman, and that the same kind of procedure as takes place at the Beth Din would produce friendly understandings. These meetings could be held in the evening and only a nominal fee should be required. This would do away with the intimidation to which the tenant is subjected to-day from house-jobbers and their solicitors, and would give them greater confidence in getting justice as they would have a representative

upon the tribunal to discuss the matter with the landlord's representative and to advise them what to do. Disputes by this method would be settled by common-sense and not by legal quibbles, and all the anomalies of the Act which operate unjustly at present could be put right. The tribunal could be in touch with the Guardians, the Unemployment Committees, and the local authorities, and if rent was owing through unemployment or sickness, arrangements could be easily made to enable the tenant to remain, and the landlord's rent could be assured. This is the easiest way to let down the Act so as to arrive gradually at a condition of free contract again; and it would prevent the exploitation that is now going on, whereby overcrowding is becoming a menace.

The League of Nations is our tribunal for international disputes. Industrial Committees are appealed to in cases of industrial warfare. Is it too much to ask, that in matters of dispute between landlord and tenant, a Conciliation Court shall be established to bring about peace in our own homes?

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